













THE STRAW-CUTTER'S DAUGHTER  
AND THE  
PORTRAIT IN MY UNCLE'S DINING-ROOM

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH  
BY  
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**THE STRAW-CUTTER'S DAUGHTER.**

**BY**

**RAOUL DE NAVERY.**

*Translated from the French.*



# THE STRAW-CUTTER'S DAUGHTER.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FARM OF CADIORNE.

It is a glorious August morning. The sun has risen red and glowing, and as he mounts higher and higher, the rich cornfields shine like a golden sea as the light breeze moves the billowy mass. The lark darts upwards from the furrow, straight as an arrow—the first of God's creatures to sing its Maker's praises; the hum of insect-life begins; and all the pleasant country sounds mingle in sweet confusion; the cattle-bell, the herdsman's song, the barking of dogs, the lowing of cattle, the shrill crow of the cock proclaiming that the business of the farm has begun.

'Hurry on, my lads,' cried cheery Père Patriarche, the rich farmer of Cadiorne, to his sons and labourers, 'we must all set briskly to work. Must have a good lot of corn got in before night; and you know that those who work well are paid well.'



Yves and Aubin, the farmer's sons, harnessed the wagon horses; Robert, the head man, gave out the sharp sickles; and the reapers bound large checked handkerchiefs under their straw hats.

Marthe, the farmer's wife, stood at her door looking on at the bright busy scene, a quiet motherly woman, yet the mainspring of the household as well as its sunshine. She managed everything with the help of one lame servant, who had grown old in her service, and whom every one called Limping Louison.

Marthe was turning away as the last of the reapers disappeared, when her youngest son, Aubin, came jumping over the blackthorn hedge, and running up to her for 'one more kiss.' She gave at least a dozen to the sunburnt face and curly black hair, and then asked whether he would not be missed in the field.

'I really had forgotten my very own little sickle, mother dear.'

'Very well, darling, be off again, and work hard.'

'And, mother, you will come to the field when the Angelus rings?'

She nodded a promise; and Aubin was off like a shot, startling the birds in the hedge with his leap and whistle.

Aubin was soon back with the rest by the side of his favourite black bullock, a noble creature, with dew-laps that nearly touched the ground, and large soft eyes that turned slowly on his young master, as if to

thank him for keeping off the flies with an oak branch, which he flapped about his head.

On reaching the field, Aubin and Yves, like the others, set to work at once, and the ripe corn fell quickly and silently as the reaping-hooks cut their way farther and farther into the field.

And now it is noon : there is no shadow cast by the trees ; the chirp of the grasshoppers and cicadas comes short and sharp in the midday heat. A bell rings, every man stops work, and the master, uncovering his head, recites the Angelus with all his men, after which all seek the group of oaks and walnuts at the bottom of the field, for the welcome hour of rest and refreshment. For the hundredth time some labourer bids his comrades beware of falling asleep under one of the walnut-trees ; for there, three feet underground, according to Breton superstition, lurks a poisonous snake, 'le sourd,' they call him, whose very presence is fatal to the luckless sleeper. So they all lie down under the oaks, all but Yves, who is afraid of nothing, and takes a pride in setting tradition, custom, and unhappily holier things than these, at defiance.

Jean Patriarche, the father of the two lads whose acquaintance we have made, was a very good specimen of a Breton farmer. He had married young ; and Marthe was his own choice as well as that of his parents. Both families were well off, and well thought of in the parish of Saint Aubin du Cormier ; the young

people had been taught by the 'old curé, who had known them from their birth; and both were good, simple, industrious, and sincerely attached. Marthe was quite an heiress in her way, with the three splendid cornfields which made her dowry; and Jean's famous speckled cattle grazed in pasture land where the grass grew breast-high. Two years after her marriage Marthe was the mother of two sons. Aubin had his father's black hair, open brow, and honest eyes, and his mother's calm gentle nature. Sincerely religious, he had a great love for the poor, and, when quite a little fellow, delighted in cutting great hunches of bread for them, which he could scarcely carry. One day he met a little barefooted boy, and instantly taking off his sabots gave them to the child, while he bound the straw which lined them on his own feet. On his return his mother asked what had become of the sabots; she kissed him tenderly when the story was told, and next market-day she bought him a smart pair of buff-leather shoes, while the impromptu slippers were carefully put away in her press. 'So,' thought Yves, 'the way to get easy shoes is to lose one's sabots.' And next day he came in barefoot and his face covered with blood.

'Good heavens! what, has happened?' said Marthe.

'Fighting with little Macclou, the goose-boy; the geese were making a horrid row, and I holloed to

him to keep them quiet; and as he chose not to mind me, I sent one of my sabots at his head.'

'For shame, Yves! A little fellow like that!'

'He's an impudent monkey, all the same; and next time I catch him I mean to wring the neck or that biggest goose of his; as soon as the chap began blubbering she flew at me, and I got as many pecks as I had given him thumps.'

'O Yves, my poor child, will you never mend your ways?'

'Why, where's the harm of licking Maclou?'

'Poor little fellow, he was doing you no harm; and he's such a good boy.'

'Is he indeed? Well, I can't abide the little beggar; and besides, I wanted shoes like Aubin's, so I got rid of my sabots; for they're broken to bits.'

'Aubin's was a very different affair.'

'Not a bit of it; it all comes to the same thing; he gave his away, and I smashed mine; so, as I haven't another pair, you'll just have to buy the shoes.'

'That I shall certainly not do.'

'O, then,' said Yves insolently, 'there's one law for Aubin, and another for me, is there?'

'Yes, there *is* a different law for a cruel disobedient boy, and for a good and charitable one. I reward the one, and I punish the other. But, mind, you are not to suppose that I love you less than him,

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because you force me to treat you differently. O Yves, you are my eldest child, the first who called me mother; and God knows how I thanked Him for you. Let me thank Him still more, Yves, as I shall do when you are a better boy; don't go on grieving your father and me. And why are you jealous of your brother? He would give up everything to you.'

'His shoes, for instance?' said Yves, with a rude laugh.

'You are a bad boy—cruel and bad.'

'So you have said before; once more, will you buy me a pair of shoes?'

'No, I will not. When you deserve favours, you shall have them.'

'Very well; I shall wring that bird's neck, and Maclou will get a flogging.'

'You will never be so wicked.'

'I will; as sure as—'

Marthe threw her arms round him: 'Hush, Yves; don't take a sinful oath. If you don't mind your mother's displeasure, fear God's anger.' °

'Let me go!' shrieked the boy, beside himself with passion. He tore himself from his mother's arms, and rushed out of the house.

Meanwhile, poor little Maclou was sitting under an old willow-tree, very sore and very sad. He had pulled a handful of wild mint, dipped it in water, and bathed his bruised head and face. By his side sat

Armelle, the straw-cutter's little daughter; she had torn up her handkerchief to bind his forehead, and was doing her best to comfort him. Maclou had told her his history, and was extolling the prowess of his beloved goose—the pride of the flock. ‘I should never have got away from him but for her, Armelle. He *did* hit hard with his sabots! Ah, he is a bad boy; but you are good, Armelle, and then you are unhappy too—like me.’

‘What makes you call me unhappy?’ said the little girl.

‘Why, because your father drinks so.’

‘I love my father,’ said Armelle quickly.

‘Well, you see I haven’t got a father,’ replied Maclou, after a moment’s reflection; ‘I’m just a foundling—something like a duck hatched by a hen, I suppose; the chickens won’t have anything to do with it, and drive it away.’

By and by Maclou forgot his troubles, and the two children were playing together quite merrily when they were interrupted by a tremendous noise. ‘The geese came waddling to them as fast as they could with their web-feet, flapping their short wings, and screaming with terror. The dog barked furiously, the cows ran wildly about the meadows, and the great black bull, the terror of the country, rushed about with his head down, his nostrils foaming, and his eyes bloodshot. At length, by the combined efforts of

Maclou and the dog, the stragglers<sup>4</sup> were got together and counted; but one was missing—the great white goose, the pride of the flock, the valiant champion of her little master. He burst into tears, crying out,

'He has killed her! I know he has.'

'O no ; he never, never could !' said Armelle ; ' he never could be such a coward !'

'Say that again !' cried an angry voice behind the children.

It was Yves, mad with passion, and clenching his fists as he spoke.

‘Very well, I will say it again, for you *are* a coward,’ said the brave child, ‘and because you are a coward you might strike me, only you won’t, bad as you are, because you know my father would give you a thrashing. And what do you suppose Maclou’s master will do to him? If your father had to punish you, he would give you a scolding, I suppose; even if he did more, he would just hit you a very little with a tiny switch. But Maclou is an orphan, with nobody to take his part; and his master will lay a great thick stick across his shoulders, and you know it! If all the boys in the village are afraid of telling the truth to “wicked Yves,” as they call you, *I’m* not; so I tell you that you are a bad fellow,—yes, I am here waiting, and you can strike me if you dare!’

The little thing spoke so fearlessly, and looked so calmly at him with her innocent eyes, that Yves slunk

away cowed and crestfallen, muttering, 'I'll pay *you* off, too, some day, so look out.'

The straw-cutter's little daughter did not even hear him; she was kneeling by poor Maclon, who had thrown himself sobbing on the ground, and trying all she could to comfort him; but his grief broke out more loudly than ever when his dog Finaud, after snuffing about in search of his missing charge, brought the dead goose to his master's feet.

'O my God,' wailed the poor child, 'how shall I ever go back to Marcotte! The goose would have fetched a couple of crowns, and the mayor's wife would have been sure to buy her for Twelfth-day. I am sure Marcotte will kill me. I had rather run away at once than face him.'

Armelle was terror-stricken. Marcotte was a dreadful man, to be sure, but then there were things as bad or worse: it would soon be dark, and brave as she was when a tangible danger was in question, she was in mortal dread of ghosts and 'loups-garous.'

'It will be very dark,' she said; 'there's no moon.'

'I know there isn't,' said the frightened child.

'And isn't there anybody you will be sorry to leave?'

'O yes, Armelle, you; you are so good and kind; and then there is Aubin, that bad boy's brother, he is good too; and so is his father—he often gives me a loaf of bread and a bowl of milk, and good advice



too; and his wife knitted me a pair of stockings at Christmas. There are plenty of good people at Saint Aubin du Cormier; and besides, when one has always lived in a place, one is sorry to leave the trees, and the cows, and—and everything.'

'Well, then, don't go.'

'But—there's Marcotte!'

'Yes, I know, there *is* Marcotte.'

And the children sat down opposite each other silently, with their elbows on their knees, puzzling how to solve the difficulty.

They were roused from their meditations by a sharp shrill cry; and looking up saw Aubin standing before them, holding in his arms a struggling goose nearly as big as himself.

'There,' he said, 'take her home with you; I believe she beats the one you lost.'

'But,' said Macloû wonderingly, 'what makes you give her to me?'

'To make up for the one my brother killed; don't you see?'

'But this goose is your father's—what will he say?'

'Why, it happens very luckily that I keep our flock of geese; so when one is found missing, they will just think I have lost it.'

'But your father will scold you.'

'Never mind that.'

‘Or beat you.’

‘My father’s beating won’t be like your master’s, Maclou ; it’s not worth thinking of.’

‘O, how good you are !’ and the little orphan clung round Aubin as if he could never leave him. Presently he said, ‘But what shall we do with the dead goose?’

‘Armelle shall take it home with her, and keep our secret.’

And so the three children went their different ways—Aubin to his comfortable bed, Armelle to her father’s wretched hut, and poor little Maclou to a kennel where Marcotte’s watch-dog used to live.

Aubin went to his home with a light step and heart, and yet he knew that he had incurred a punishment. No matter ; better so than that poor little Maclou should suffer unjustly, or that his own kind parents should be grieved by this new instance of his brother’s violence. Still, Aubin was but a child, and brave as he was, he liked being punished as little as any other child ; so he turned a little out of the way to say a prayer at the foot of an old wayside cross, where he often brought his childish troubles and difficulties. At the foot of this rude Calvary, in a niche, stood an image of our Lady. It was made of the coarsest pottery ; over it hung a box, into which the village children now and then dropped a sou, and the shepherds often laid bunches of broom and heather

on the steps. There she stood, in her little niche, smiling on every one, and holding out her child to the poor and suffering, to young and old; there was no rich canopy over her head, no jewels decked her crown; only the blue sky above her, and the sweet wild-flowers at her feet. No trained voices sang antiphons in her honour; but many a 'Hail, Mary,' was whispered, many a simple hymn sung before her. And the birds perched on the arms of the cross, and greeted her with their carols. Ah, many were the confidences breathed into her ear; many the good resolutions formed at her feet; many a mother came there to pray for her children, and countless blessings fell from her sweet hands on bent heads and aching hearts. 'Our Lady of the Road,' they called her; and I am sure she showed the road to heaven to many a suppliant.

Aubin knelt down on the steps, laid a bunch of wild-flowers on them, and prayed for strength to do right, then for all he loved—not forgetting the straw-cutter's little girl—and lastly for Marcotte. As he crossed the threshold of his home, he thought he caught a glimpse of Armelle crossing the yard, and carrying something white, and a large basket. But what could Armelle be doing at the farm? He entered the big room where meals were taken; his brother was there, but neither of his parents. He asked the carter where they were. The man pointed silently

to the door of the inner room, and Aubin, startled and a little frightened, sat down by the fire, and Labrie his dog couched at his feet. For this inner room was one which was only used on solemn and important occasions; the children of the house, indeed, were never allowed to enter it till the day of their First Communion. Afterwards they were only admitted for very grave reasons. To be sent for into the inner room was an alarming event.

Limping Louison now came in, full of consternation, exclaiming that one goose was missing; and at the same moment Jean and Marthe came in. Both looked very grave, and there were traces of tears in Marthe's eyes; but the master took his place as usual, said grace, and supper began. There was plenty of talking at the meal, much joking with Louison, and many compliments to the mistress on her cookery. The farm-servants discussed everything which concerned the interest of their employers with a kind of filial eagerness which is peculiarly Breton, and the farmer, in return, treated them more like children than inferiors. On this particular evening, however, his words were few and short; and the servants were on the point of withdrawing, when he said to the herdsman,

'Are all the cattle right?'

'Yes, master.'

'Jacquet' (to the shepherd), 'did you count the sheep and goats?'

'Ay, master; they are all right.'

'And your geese, Louison?'

'There is one short.' And the old servant cast a pitying glance at Aubin.

The farmer turned to his son.

'You have been careless,' he said severely. 'Careless shepherds must be punished. Your godfather made you a present of six francs on New-year's-day; the goose you have lost was worth quite as much as that; you have forfeited the money; others must not suffer for your fault.'

'No, father, you are quite right.'

'Now, children, it is bed-time; come and say good-night.'

Yves came slowly forward; and as he knelt at his father's feet, Jean said in a low and broken voice, 'Take warning, Yves; do not disgrace your father.'

Aubin meanwhile had gone to his mother for her blessing; and as she laid her hand on his head, she said with great tenderness, 'May God bless thee, as I do!'

Aubin was not long before he fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw Armelle busily employed in removing the wings of the dead goose. As she did so, they grew larger and larger. She fastened them to Aubin's shoulders; and to his surprise and delight, he

began flying about like a bird or an angel. A rough shake roused him from his dream. Yves was standing by his bed with an excited expression.

‘If you dare to say a word!’ he muttered.

‘What about?’

‘You know well enough: it’s lucky for you that only I heard you just now talking about the goose, and Armelle, and angels, and the crown-piece.’

‘You know quite well, Yves, that I never meant to say a word.’

This little incident will show the character of the brothers. As Yves grew older, his mother’s anxieties increased. She was very gentle with the stubborn ill-conditioned boy, always reproving him with kindness, often with tears. She never praised his brother to him, for fear of exciting his temper; and with a mother’s patient hopefulness she was always trying to find some tender spot in his heart; but all in vain. The good Abbé Kerdrec was untiring in his efforts for the amendment of this black sheep of his fold, but it really seemed as though the boy had neither heart nor conscience. The jealousy with which he had always regarded Aubin had become something terribly like hatred, ever since the story of the goose; he never would believe but that Aubin had told his mother everything. He was right in thinking that Marthe knew the truth, though not from his brother. The straw-cutter’s little daughter could not feel easy

in her honest child's conscience at receiving Aubin's present. A fat goose would be very nice for supper, certainly; but was it quite right? And so, while Aubin was praying at the Calvary, she had taken the goose to the farmer's wife, and told her the whole story in confidence; for she did not forget Aubin's wish to screen his brother. Marthe was very much touched; she stooped down and kissed Armelle, telling her to keep the goose as a present from her, and giving her besides a loaf and a bottle of wine. So now there was a secret between Marthe and little Armelle.

There came a time when there seemed to be a hope of Yves changing for the better. The boys were preparing for their First Communion; and certainly both the curé and Jean and Marthe thought he was impressed by the instructions he had received. He was less gloomy and jealous, and once or twice he threw his arms round his brother, and earnestly asked his forgiveness. The eve of the great day came; and when the boys knelt to ask pardon of their parents for all they had ever done to offend them, Yves covered their hands with kisses and tears. Poor Marthe! it seemed to her like her firstborn's second and better birthday. When the family returned from the Mass, at which the children had received their Lord for the first time, the parents led them into the inner room, and Jean Patriarche opened a large book which lay

upon the table, and told the boys that it had been in the family for two hundred years. It was the Book of the Holy Gospels, and on the fly-leaves were written important family events—births, marriages, &c.

‘After this great day,’ said the farmer, ‘Should you commit any serious fault, God forbid it should be a crime, I should be obliged to write it down in this book. May this necessity never occur! Here, my children, write down your names; and may God give you grace and strength to live and die His faithful servants!’

There was character shown in the very way in which the lads signed their names. Yves scrawled his in a hasty slap-dash fashion; Aubin wrote his slowly, feeling as he did so the solemnity of the occasion, and of his father's words. Jean added the date of the month and year; and the children left the room in silence. From this time, the servants called them ‘our young masters,’ which much gratified the self-importance of Yves. Still, that was a small matter; and the boy seemed so altered for the better, that for six months Marthe was happy. At the end of that time, however, the old anxieties returned. He went seldomer to church; he grew cold and reserved with his mother; complaints of him were constantly being brought to his father. One day he had turned some cows into a clover-field; on another he had overturned a neighbour's beehives, or robbed



his orchard. Jean's remonstrances were met by indifference or insolence; and by degrees Yves took to frequenting the tavern on Sundays, and keeping company with lads as idle and mischievous as himself; and now there was always one empty seat in the family bench at church, one absent at the evening meal on Sunday. The unhappy boy had become one of the habitués of the Foaming Pitcher, a low tavern, kept by a good-for-nothing old fellow named Machecoul, who kept a running account with Yves, not forgetting to charge interest. 'Drink what you like, my boy,' he would say, 'you are a fine fellow, and like to treat your friends. Never mind the score now; we'll settle accounts when you come of age.' Things went on in this way from bad to worse. If Aubin had shown the slightest inclination to follow in his brother's steps, the parents would have been compelled to send the latter away; but it was not so, and therefore they waited, wept, and prayed. The farmer scarcely ever spoke to his eldest son now, except to give necessary orders, which were received in surly silence. Yves did his work, and did it well; but his father would rather have seen him fail with humility than succeed with insolent pride. It may seem strange that this very fault did not keep him from associating with the low set who frequented Machecoul's tavern; but the truth was, that he was a sort of king among them, and the deference they showed him flattered his vanity.

Now and then he had moments of tenderness towards his mother, and a look from her would make his heart swell; but his bitter envy of Aubin always stifled the good impulse, and he would turn away muttering, 'She does not love me; he is all she cares for.' Ah, no, poor misguided boy; it is the lost sheep we go after, the lost groat that we seek for. And so, like all mothers to whom our Lady has bequeathed her heritage of sorrow, Marthe hid the sword in her heart, and suffered silently.

This, then, was the state of things at Cadiorne when we introduced this family to our readers: plenty and prosperity, with a secret sorrow blighting all.

The shadows were lengthening; only a few sheaves had to be bound: the farmer, standing in the great wagon, caught them one by one, as Yves threw them up to him with a strong steady hand. 'Cheerily, my lads,' cried Jean Patriarche; 'the mistress has supper ready, and it is growing late.'

There is only one sheaf left now; but what a grand one it is—the harvest-home sheaf! It is always made with extra care, and presented with some ceremony to the master, whose business it is to pour over it a bottle of good old wine as he receives it. There is, I confess, a touch of paganism about this old custom, but it is a pretty and graceful one nevertheless.

The farm-servants and day-labourers go singing merrily to fetch the harvest-home sheaf, with its gay

ribbons and bouquets, from the end of the field. Jean Baptiste and Pierrot are preparing to lift it, but stop with a startled exclamation at the sight of a ragged child sleeping quietly in the shadow of the sheaf. Poor little thing! her thin hand was holding some grains which she had rubbed from the husk before falling asleep. 'Holy Mary!' cried one of the men; 'it is the straw-cutter's daughter!'

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HARVEST HOME.

AND why was the straw-cutter's daughter so much to be pitied? Alas for poor little Armelle! she was worse than an orphan. Her mother had died worn out and heart-broken; a long course of ill-usage had hastened her end. Her husband was a hopeless drunkard; he would come reeling home from the Foaming Pitcher and load her with reproaches and abuse; sometimes the neighbours heard Annette's voice broken by sobs, then a scream; and more than once she had been seen running out of the house with her child in her arms, to pass the night in an outhouse or a yard. If it was very wet or cold she would knock timidly at the door of a farmhouse; and it would have been a hard heart indeed that could have refused shelter to the pale trembling woman, with her child's rosy face pressed to the bosom so ill-protected from

the winter wind. Then, at daybreak, she crept back to her wretched home, lit the fire, prepared the poor breakfast, and all with the most uncomplaining patience. But there came a day when Machecoul refused to let the straw-cutter add to his score unless he paid a part of his reckoning. This he could not do; high words followed, and Machecoul said: 'Your wife has to beg her bread through your misconduct. Annette is my god-daughter, and if she comes to me, I sha'n't refuse her.' The straw-cutter went home mad with fury, which, only seemed increased by the silence with which his wife met his abuse. He dragged her out of the house, and as she fell, he pushed her with his foot against the door-step. In the morning he remembered nothing of what had happened, but noticed with surprise that there were no preparations for his breakfast. He opened the house-door; there Annette lay, her hair loose on her shoulders, her white face upturned; on the left temple was a deep-red mark: he gave only one look, and fled from the place. Soon afterwards, a labourer, who wanted some straw for the finishing of his bee-hives, came to the door; he lifted up the poor young woman, bathed her face, and gradually she recovered consciousness. Recognising the man, she said: 'I had a fall, Catherinet, but it is nothing. Many thanks; I am so sorry to have troubled you; my husband will be wanting his breakfast.' She just

managed to drag herself to the bed, and to say: 'Catherinet, go and send the priest to me: God will repay you for your trouble.' The man went, with tears in his eyes, to do her bidding. Poor Annette! her long martyrdom was all but ended. She confessed, and received absolution, and received the 'Bread of life' to support her on her last journey. She died very quietly, forgiving her husband, but troubled about her little one. 'Who will take care of her?' she said to the priest. 'Providence, my child,' he answered, 'is a good mother to the orphan.'

Two neighbours stayed beside Annette's corpse; and when her husband came in, one of them said: 'Take off your hat, Daniel; you must pay her some respect in death, though you made her life wretched.'

He obeyed mechanically.

'Say a prayer, Daniel; she is gone to God, and she forgave you.'

The straw-cutter knelt, but he did not know how to pray. He could feel remorse though, and the thought of his heart was: 'She never gave me an angry word, and I have killed her!'

The next day he followed her to the grave, and afterwards took his little girl in his arms, and leading by a string the goat whose milk had fed her, went to one of the women who had watched by his wife, and agreed to pay her so much a month for taking care of the child.

Little Armelle grew and thrived. Chantefleur doted on her; the only trouble was that every now and then her father talked of having her home; but the good woman put him off, and said he had better wait till she was old enough to cook his dinner and mind the house. He saw that the child was terribly afraid of him, and this made him furious.

When Armelle was seven years old, he took her home. It was a sad change for the poor child; but the thing that she most missed was hearing Chantefleur talk of her mother. One day she had put a rosary round the child's neck, telling her that her mother said it every day; and never since then had Armelle failed to say it too. She pulled up daisy-tufts, and planted them on her grave, and gathered the first violets, and the pretty little milk-worts to lay there. One day a little boy gave her a bird's nest, in which were some downy nestlings: she put it in a wild rose-bush which grew by the grave, and told the little birds to sing to her mother when they were old enough. Chantefleur had always kept her neat and tidy, but now the frocks were in rags, and the little feet bare. She was very ignorant. Daniel refused to send her to school, and very often she had to beg.

One evening, when she was about ten years old, her father came in with a coarse untidy-looking woman, whom he ordered Armelle to call 'mother.'

'My mother is dead,' said the child gravely.

'This is your second mother.'

'Chantefleur is my second mother.'

'Indeed ! and what is my wife ?'

The child seemed stupefied ; then, after awhile, she said gently : ' Father, now that you have some one else to look after you, you do not want me.'

' I don't turn you out, mind.'

' But I am going,' she answered.

' A good riddance,' cried La Gervaise, for that was the woman's name.

Armelle went up to her father, and asked him to give her her mother's wedding-ring. The man turned pale ; he had placed it on the finger of La Gervaise. The child had noticed what seemed to her a sacrilege.

' Give it her,' muttered Daniel, ' I can get you another.'

The woman drew it off, and threw it rudely on the ground. Armelle picked it up, kissed it, fastened it to her mother's rosary, and then said slowly and sorrowfully : ' Good-bye, father.'

The man's heart smote him.

' Stop here,' he said, ' and I promise never to beat you again.'

But La Gervaise rose, and facing him, said resolutely : ' She or I—choose between us.'

Then Armelle repeated, ' Good-bye, father ;' opened the door, knelt down, kissed the door-step, and went away.

It was a lovely night ; the stars looked down from a cloudless sky. Armelle did not feel lonely ; it seemed as if some one was beside her, taking care of her ; her mother or her angel-guardian — perhaps both. She walked straight to the churchyard. What a pretty carpet the turf made, starred over with daisies ; and how sweetly the nightingale was singing ! She lay down on the grave, and slept quietly till morning ; then she awoke with the sun, the swallows in the tower, and the church-bell. She slipped into a confessional, for she was ashamed of her rags ; and when Mass was over, she slipped out again.

What was she to do ? Chantefleur had left the neighbourhood for a day or two. But, to be sure, it was harvest-time ; she should soon glean a little bundle ; the miller was a kind man, and would give her in exchange for it a loaf of bread. Providence guided her to the field of Jean Patriarche ; she gleaned all day, ate the corn, which she rubbed out in her hands, drank from the stream which ran at the bottom of the field, made a dessert of blackberries, and then, quite tired out, she laid her bunch of ears beside her, and fell asleep in the shadow of the harvest-home sheaf, with the names of God and her mother on her lips.

She awoke with a start as Pierrot's cry brought the reapers to the spot. She looked round her with a scared expression, pushed her tangle of fair hair back



from her little pale face, and said : ' I may keep my bundle, mayn't I ? '      ' r

' Poor little mite ! ' said Pierrot, ' how hard she must have worked to get all that ! I'll tell you what, you fellows, I've got an idea : suppose the Straw-cutter's daughter gives the sheaf to the master ? '      ' t

' Well said ! a capital notion ! '      ' t

A wreath of wheat-ears and corn flowers had been made, ready for the ceremony, and this was placed on Armelle's head. The men undid the wisp of straw which bound the sheaf, and placed the child in the middle of it ; only her head was visible.

' Poor little maid ! ' said Pierrot ; ' I wish she had poppies on her cheeks, as well as corn-flowers in her eyes. '      ' t

' Up with the sheaf, the bonny harvest-home sheaf ! '      ' t

Père Patriarche was sitting quietly on the wagon-pole, waiting for the sheaf ; his sons were beside him ; Yves was looking unusually pleasant, and the father felt almost happy.

' The sheaf seems tolerably heavy, ' he said, smiling.      ' t

The men laid it with a laugh at their master's feet.

' It is good grain, ' said old Pierrot, ' which the good God has ripened. See what He has hidden in the sheaf—a bird without a nest, a daisy plucked up by the roots. See, master, we have made her a bed of fresh straw, just as our Lady did for her little Jesus. '      ' t

Patriarche could not understand a word of all this, till a pretty little pale face met his wondering eyes, as Pierrot's sickle cut the straw band, and the golden ears fell in a shower at Armelle's feet. The good farmer's eyes were wet. 'Poor little lark,' he said, did you make a nest in the corn ?

'I was gleaning,' answered the little one ; 'and I fell asleep ; and it was Pierrot—'

'Pierrot is a clever fellow,' returned Jean with a kind smile. 'You shall have the harvest-home sheaf, my child. When God gives abundantly, our hands must be open like His. But your father ?'

'He is married again, to La Gervaise.'

'Good heavens ! And you are turned out of doors ?'

'I am sure father would have kept me ; but—'

'But he is afraid of La Gervaise. I see—a woman like that ! What a shame ! what a sin—'

Patriarche broke off abruptly ; then, at a sign from him, Armelle was lifted into the high wagon ; the two lads led the horses, and he himself followed slowly and thoughtfully.

It was a pretty, yet a sad sight : the little thing, with her bare feet crossed, sitting smiling on her golden throne, crowned with flowers and innocence.

As soon as they reached the farm, Jean Patriarche took his wife's hand, and saying, 'I want to speak to you,' led her into the family sanctuary, the inner room.

'Wife,' he said, 'I do not wait to give you a command; I do not even ask you to do what I wish for my sake; I only want to say this: we have a wound deep down in our hearts; let us move the good God to cure it by doing a good action. The straw-cutter is going from bad to worse. The house where La Gervaise is mistress is not a fit home for Armelle. Last night she slept on her mother's grave, and the angels watched over her. Where can she sleep to-night? where can she go to-morrow? Our men, who found her sleeping by the sheaf, brought her to me like a dove in its nest; and I have been thinking—'

Marthe opened the Book of the Gospels, and taking a pen, she wrote in a bold firm hand,

'The day of our harvest-home, 18—, Jean and Marthe Patriarche have adopted Armelle, the straw-cutter's daughter, and taken her for their own child.'

The farmer kissed her gravely and silently, and Marthe said in a low voice, 'May our Lord have mercy on Yves!' Then she opened the great oaken cupboard, saying, 'I have all Jeanne's things here, and now that God has given me another daughter, they will do for her.'

So Armelle was washed, combed, and dressed. Marthe put a gold cross round her neck, replaced the garland on her head, and then sat down in the great arm-chair by her husband's desk, while he threw the door wide open, and made a sign for his sons and

servants to enter. Then he rose, took off his hat, and said, 'Before God and before our own conscience, we promise to bring up Armelle as a good Christian girl. Love her, all of you, as you love us, for His sake who has loved us all.'

Poor little Armelle ! she could hardly believe that it was all true. The only cloud was, that Yves did not look at her as kindly as Aubin did ; she was afraid she should have only one brother. But troubles are soon over at her age ; and besides, why should Yves not like her ? The story of the goose was four years old.

At the end of the evening, Jean spoke with honest indignation of Daniel's conduct.

'Patience,' said Marthe ; 'the child will save him yet.'

'His wife tried, and it cost her her life.'

Marthe answered, 'What is that as the price of a soul ?'

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE STRAW-CUTTER'S BARGAIN.

ARMELLE's business was to keep the sheep ; Aubin had charge of the horses and cows. The two went out together, the boy carrying the basket containing their dinners, the girl with a book in her pocket, and her distaff stuck in her girdle. In winter,

the first thing was to make a fire. Aubin managed capitally with heather and dead branches, and the children sat before it on two large stones, chatting merrily. They baked their potatoes and chestnuts in the ashes, sang songs, and talked about Marthe's kindness and Jean Patriarche's generosity. Sometimes Maclou joined them. When Finaud was playing with Labrie, Maclou was never far from Aubin and Armelle. His love for them was a passion, a worship, as it is apt to be with the forlorn and desolate: he would have died for either of them. After their dinner, they fed the birds, which were so tame that they came to pick up the crumbs under their very sabots. Sometimes Aubin read stories to Armelle. She conceived a great idea of the dignity of her occupation when she heard that Paris had been saved from a terrible king by a shepherdess, and a king of France restored to his throne by another. What a pity her name was not Geneviève or Jeanne, instead of Armelle!

When the day of her First Communion came, she wished to see her father, and her adopted parents took her to his cottage: it was empty. Marcotte, who was passing, said, 'Go to Machecoul's tavern.'

The child turned away with a shudder, saying to Marthe, 'Mother, let us go home.'

But there was a trial in store for her on the way. Her father met them, singing, shouting, and curs-

ing. Armelle trembled from head to foot; but without hesitating a moment, she went up to him and said, 'Father, I have been to your house to ask your blessing. God is giving me a great grace, and I want you to share in it.'

'Is that why you are all in white? You are a fine lady now, fed and clothed with the best.'

She took his hand fearlessly.

'What do you want?' Daniel asked.

'I want to say just one word to you.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Father, what you say is true: I am well fed, and clothed, and loved at Jean Patriarche's; and yet, for all that, my heart often aches. I should like to share your poverty and your trouble. I want to be back in the house where mother died. Send away La Gervaise, father—they say she is not really your wife—and let me come back, and take care of you and love you. O father, you don't know how sweet it is to be loved! May I come to you?'

The man burst into a loud laugh.

'You want to preach, I suppose.'

'No,' answered Armelle.

'Well, then, to cry, as your mother did.'

'I will not cry,' said the child.

'Children are only a trouble. La Gervaise suits me best.'

He went away, and Armelle clung to Marthe,

weeping bitterly. By and by she said, 'Mother, it would have broken my heart to leave you ; but—'

'I understand, child ; and don't you suppose I should have been sorry to lose my daughter ? But there are only two roads, you see—a wrong and a right one—and when you took the right one, I wasn't going to stop you. Why, Armelle, I couldn't love you so much, unless you did your duty !'

So there was a heavy cloud overshadowing that blessed day—the brightest and fairest in a child's life. She was never again the same merry laughing creature as before ; she grew very thoughtful — almost gloomy at times ; she knew too much now. It was well for her that she could rest on the tender and faithful heart of Marthe. She felt so safe under her motherly wing—so sheltered by her love. The conduct of Yves was another grief to the poor girl. This indifference had turned to positive hatred. He tried to wound and humiliate her in every possible way. He told her that he had met her father at the tavern, or that he had seen him fighting ; he grudged her the clothes she wore, and the bread she ate ; he would sit smoking by the well while he made her draw heavy pails to fill the trough. She never refused to do anything ; she never complained. This cruel Yves was the son of one who was both her master and her father, and she obeyed him in silence.

Armelle was turned fifteen. Pretty, pious, and

the adopted daughter of the rich farmer, she had plenty of suitors; but she refused them all, saying simply that she was much too young, and wished to stay with Marthe.

One winter's evening it was snowing fast as Armelle was bringing her sheep home; the wind was very high, and she could hardly keep the hood of her cloak over her head, as she struggled on, blinded by the thick flakes. Presently Labrie barked furiously, and the sheep pressed close together, shivering more from fear than cold. Something red, glaring, was a few steps before her. The terrified girl fell on her knees, unable either to cry out or to run away. The two flaming eyes—for such they were—came nearer. She felt as if they drew her irresistibly towards them. Then she saw dark shadowy things like great, hideous, rough dogs. Labrie leaped gallantly on one of the creatures, the other sprang upon Armelle. She felt suffocated; a hot fiery breath was on her cheek. She had a dim consciousness of a struggle around her, and then all was darkness. When she came to herself, the farm servants, holding torches, were kneeling beside her. On the snow was a pool of blood; beside it a dead wolf. 'Hush!' said Marthe, as she tried to speak; 'you shall hear everything presently.' She was taken into the great hall at the farm. There sat Aubin, pale as death, leaning his head on the table; beside him stood Yves, his hand



bleeding, and his forehead bound with a handkerchief.

‘O,’ cried Armelle, ‘what has happened?’

‘It was a wolf; two wolves rather,’ answered Yves shortly.

‘You were all but devoured by one,’ added his mother.

‘And Yves saved my life?’

‘I only killed the wolf.’

‘The wolf that was going to kill me?’

‘Well, and if I did save your life, what would that prove?’

She went up to him, and said, in a voice thrilling with emotion: ‘It would prove that you have a tiny bit of love for your little sister. No one can give more than his life for any one.’

‘I don’t know,’ answered Yves brusquely. ‘I think plenty of people give their lives, or their deaths, if you like, easily enough, from love, or hatred, or whim, or because they are fools; but to sacrifice one’s life, one’s whole life, day by day, hour by hour, that’s different.’

‘It is much sweeter,’ said Armelle.

‘Now, look here; if you knew that you could save Daniel from sin or damnation by throwing yourself into the flames or under a mill-wheel, would you not do it?’

‘O, yes.’

‘But would you consent to live with him—close to him—always; to see him jealous of your services, of your love? Would you agree to let him tyrannise over you, when all the while there was a peaceful happy life ready for you elsewhere?’

‘Yes, Yves; I would.’

‘Why, it would be a hell!’

‘No; a martyrdom.’

‘But without any one to force you to it?’

‘There is duty, Yves.’

‘And would you sacrifice everything to duty?’

‘Everything. But,’ she said, after a pause, ‘your hand is not properly bound up; the blood is coming through the linen. Yves, let me see to it.’ And she gently undid the handkerchief, bathed and dressed the gaping wound, with a light tender hand. ‘You will not hate me any more, will you?’ she asked winningly.

‘Do you love me, then?’

‘Certainly I do.’

‘I know what that means—just nothing.’ Then, all at once, he broke out passionately: ‘And have I not reason to hate you? You have taken from me my place in the house; you are slowly stealing away what little love my mother has left for me; you are robbing me of my birthright!’

‘Be silent,’ said Aubin. ‘I will neither have you ask her whether she loves you nor say that you hate her.’

Angry words were rapidly exchanged, and Armelle with difficulty quieted the brothers. Soon after, Aubin went out ; and when the farmer and his wife returned, Yves and their adopted daughter were talking together happily enough.

From the day when the straw-cutter's daughter had stood up so bravely in Maclou's defence, Yves had disliked her from his heart. When his parents adopted her, this dislike became positive hatred. But gradually another feeling came ; I can scarcely say to replace the other, for even the love which he was beginning to cherish for Armelle was so strange, so vehement, so absolutely without any softening influence, that it seemed still to retain some of the elements of the old hatred. As to the simple happy child herself, she guessed nothing of all this, but went on quietly feeding her sheep, singing her songs, and reading the stories of St. Geneviève and Jeanne d'Arc. When the Abbé Kerdrec spoke of her to Jean and Marthe, he called her his 'saintly little shepherdess.'

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The long evenings had begun ; the women knitted or shelled peas. Loic the bell-ringer, the musician of the village, brought his 'binion,' and played sad or merry tunes, or told stories of ghosts and 'loups-garoux' that made one's hair stand on end. He delighted in giving his audience a fright, and seeing how close the girls kept together when the time came to separate.

Brittany is such a place for 'eerie' sights and sounds. Think of all the 'fairy-rocks,' the mysterious 'lavan-dières' of the streams, the 'white ladies' in the ruins ; then the 'death-chariot,' which passes noiselessly along, and the 'hollah' of the 'night-huntsmen'! It is all delightfully terrifying, and Père Loic was a great favourite with the young people. He was the first to see how it was with Yves, and to give him a hint. 'Take my word for it,' he said, 'and give up that idea ; the hawk does not mate with the dove, nor the lamb with the wolf.' These words set him thinking. 'She *shall* love me,' he said ; and he set about trying to win her with all his might. Marthe was full of joy at the change in his manners and conduct, and Armelle treated him with affectionate kindness. All was sunshine at the farm.

Lent was over. The Paschal candle was lighted in the church, and the Abbé Kerdrec had preached on the threefold resurrection ; that of our Lord, that of our hearts, and that of the teeming earth.

Marthe and her husband, Armelle and Aubin, came out of church, full of peace and joy. Aubin gathered some 'Alleluia flowers,' and offered them to Armelle, saying : 'They are not to be gathered in Lent ; it would make our Lady weep ; but she smiles on those who pluck them at Easter.'

'Thanks, Aubin ; I will put them on my mother's grave.'

'And may I pray there with you,' he asked timidly, 'as if I were her son?'

'And my brother.'

They knelt, one on each side of Annette's grave, and prayed silently for a few minutes. Then Aubin bent down till his face touched the grass, and said: 'Annette, Annette, let me tell you that I love Armelle.'

The girl rose from her knees; before her, just behind Aubin, stood the Abbé Kerdrec. Then, without a blush, with the grave religious simplicity of the Breton character, she drew from her finger her mother's ring, and gave it to the priest.

'In the name of your mother, Armelle, your humble holy mother, I approve of Aubin as your husband; and as I know the mind of Jean and Marthe Patriarche, I betroth you here to each other, in the sight of God and of the holy dead.'

The Abbé Kerdrec walked home with the affianced pair, telling them the story of Tobias and Sara; he bade them remember that life is a pilgrimage, and that their happiness depended on their love for each other and for God. Then he said that they were very young, and had better not marry till after harvest.

'O, father,' said Aubin, 'I could wait Jacob's seven years now. I could do anything so that I may have Armelle for my wife at last.'

‘Very well, my children ; I will settle it all with your father. You will do well, I am sure, and it will be a pleasure to me to give you to each other.’

There was quite a grand dinner at the farm. Marthe surpassed herself. The mayor was present, with a friend of his, a magistrate from Rennes, a little, sharp, thin man, with a voice like a peacock's. He wanted a vote from Patriarche, and therefore did him the honour of drinking his wine and eating his chickens. Patriarche had no fancy for men of the law. As a rule, country people consider them a bloodthirsty race, from the *gendarme* to the *avocat*. The *procureur impérial* is the worst of the lot. The only legal functionary they consider useful is the *garde champêtre*, who looks after their orchards. The farmer, therefore, was perfectly civil, but very careful to support the dignity of the spade and the plough. Yves was in a state of suppressed fury with the dry little man, who kept looking at Armelle through his eyeglass. She, on her part, saw nothing of what was going on ; she kept touching her left hand with her right ; it seemed so strange to feel no ring there. Then she thought that Aubin would soon give her another, with their names engraved inside, and a date, which the Abbé Kerdrec would bless. She remembered the Alleluia flowers which she had laid on Annette's grave, and that the Curé was going to tell the great event of the day to Jean and Marthe. The

- . tears sprang to her eyes at the thought of kneeling for Marthe's blessing.

After dinner, Patriarche went into the garden with his guests. The Abbé Kerdrec said a few words in a low voice to Marthe, who led the way to the family sanctuary, and the lovers went for a stroll in a little green paddock surrounded by a thick hawthorn hedge. They talked of their childish days, of how they had loved each other all their lives, of the happiness which awaited them. Then Marthe and the Abbé joined them, and soon after, Patriarche.

'God bless you, my children; we have settled everything—M. l'Abbé and I. We shall have to see to our daughter's *trousseau*, that's all; there will be no house to find for you: the old folks would be lost if you left them.'

Meanwhile, Yves met Daniel in the road, and invited him to accompany him to Machecoul's. He had overheard the conversation of Aubin and Armelle in the meadow, and his resolution was taken.

'I can't come,' answered the straw-cutter; 'he refuses me credit now.'

'Come on, I'll pay,' said Yves.

The fact was, Daniel's peccadilloes had multiplied of late; he had taken to poaching, if to no worse. When a hen came in his way, it was seen no more; he borrowed, and forgot to pay; everything short of actual stealing he was capable of; but he had not

gone so far as taking money, and he made the strangest compromises with his conscience. The miserable man was very much altered in appearance lately; there was a wild wandering look in his eyes; sometimes he laughed idiotically; at others he would remain for hours without speaking, and then suddenly tell such strange weird stories, that Loic himself might have been jealous. His hands trembled a good deal; still, he was as good as ever with the scythe and the sickle, but more gloomy, silent, and fierce-looking every day. When he went by, scythe in hand, the children ran away in a fright, and said he looked like the pictures of Death.

When he had drunk some wine he brightened up a little.

‘Capital wine this,’ he said.

‘A barrel of it in one’s cellar wouldn’t be a bad thing in the winter,’ suggested Yvès.

‘I believe you.’

‘Well, Père Daniel, I will send you a couple.’

‘And what will there be to pay?’

‘Not a farthing.’

‘Nothing at all?’

‘One word, just one, that’s all.’

‘Let us hear it, by all means.’

‘You have a daughter—’

‘And a pretty one too.’

‘Well, will you have me for a son-in-law?’



‘Patriarche would not allow it.’

‘Yes, he would. Come, Daniel, two hogsheads of wine and three hundred francs on the wedding-day. I will thatch and whitewash your cottage, and give you a cow into the bargain.’

‘That’s all very well ; but I don’t half like giving up Armelle.’

‘Why, you turned her out of doors !’

‘Never mind that ; I can take her back whenever I like now, but if she’s married I can’t.’

‘I’ll pay you so much a year regularly.’

‘How much?’

‘A hundred and fifty francs.’

‘It must be all properly done, mind ; drawn up by the notary ; and on the whole I prefer three hundred francs down. Give me a bill for that sum, payable at three months’ date, and you shall be married at the end of that time.’

‘Done !’ cried the young man.

When Machecoul came in, he gave Yves a knowing wink, and said:

‘Are things going on all right?’

‘Capitally ; I am to marry his daughter.’

‘My daughter and my debts.’

Yves took the straw-cutter home, and returned to the farm with his head in a wild confusion. Was it not all a dream, what he had heard behind the hedge and his wicked bargain with Daniel?

## CHAPTER IV.

### ANNETTE'S GRAVE.

•EARLY the next morning, the Abbé Kerdrec went to the straw-cutter's house. It was a wretched place. The walls were damp, black, and cracked; the thatch hung, green and decaying, on the rotten beams; the door was almost off its hinges. The inside was no better. Ragged clothes lay about the place; in one corner fowls were pecking on a heap of straw; broken plates, cabbage-leaves, potato-parings, strewed the floor; and it all looked doubly disgusting on that fresh sweet morning, when every thing was so bright and beautiful—when Nature had donned her green robe, gemmed with dewdrops, and wreathed her brow with flowers. But darker yet is the contrast between the song of the birds, the rustle of the breeze, the perfume of the flowers, and the blasphemy of the man who ignores or insults the God of whose Uncreated Beauty all this fair world of nature is a faint image.

The good priest walked along slowly and thoughtfully, blessing all the creatures of God. A book was passed through his girdle, but it was the open book of Nature that he was studying, and his eyes were full of love and gratitude. He drew near to the straw-cutter's house—it was like a blot on the fair landscape. Daniel was walking before the door, reflecting on last

night's transaction, and never noticed the Abbé Kerdrec till he spoke.

'Good-morning, my friend. I come from Jean Patriarche, who has commissioned me to ask your consent to Armelle's marriage with his son.'

'My consent! Certainly, M. l'Abbé—with all my heart.'

'I am glad you see no objection; the marriage will be after harvest.'

'O indeed; it is put off till then.'

'It will be a time of leisure then; I want you to give a written consent.'

'Are you afraid that I shall go back from my word?'

'No; but I am afraid that you will pay too many visits to Père Machecoul.'

'I see; all right. La Gervaise, bring us paper and ink!'

'I have brought everything with me,' said the priest; 'let me read you the form, and then you will only have to sign.' And he read: 'I, Daniel, commonly called "the straw-cutter," hereby give my consent to the marriage of my daughter Armelle with Aubin Patriarche, younger son of Jean Patriarche of the farm of Cadiorne.'

'You have made a mistake, M. l'Abbé; you have written "Aubin" instead of "Yves."'

'Yves? It is for Aubin that Jean and Marthe ask your daughter.'

'Well, then, it's a mess,' said the straw-cutter, 'for only last evening I promised her to Yves.'

'It was a rash promise, Daniel. Aubin is a young man of unblemished character and sincerely attached to Armelle, who returns his affection.'

'All that matters nothing to me. Yves suits me best; and a girl must obey her father.'

'And do you dare to call yourself by that title?' asked the priest indignantly. 'Did you not drive the child from her home? Are you not insulting your dead wife by the presence of the woman you have put in her place? What have you done for the poor girl who has been brought up by the Patriarches? You only remember that you are father in order to tyrannise over her; the duties of a father you shamelessly forget! Daniel, beware of braving God's anger!'

'You may spare your sermon, M. le Curé. The long and short of the matter is this: Armelle is not of age, and I am her father. She either marries Yves Patriarche, or comes back to me.'

'You have no right to dictate terms,' said the Abbé Kerdrec; 'you lost that right the day you brought that woman to your house.'

'I may engage a servant, I suppose; and it is my own affair.'

'You will find that it is that of others too.'

'Very well; but in any case I refuse to sign that paper.'

'Daniel, be merciful. Yves is a bad fellow, and Aubin and Armelle love one another. Have you never loved any one yourself—not your mother, nor Annette?'

'No,' thundered the miserable man; 'my mother cursed me, and Annette—'

'Forgave you.'

'All I know is this, I want wine and I want money. Yves will pay Machecoul and secure my credit. There!' And he turned his back on the priest and went into the house.

Very slowly and sadly the Abbé Kerdrec returned to the presbytery. As he passed the mayor's house, he saw him at the window, and the thought struck him that he would ask his advice. He told the whole story to the worthy man, who reflected for a minute, and then said:

'Don't despair yet, M. l'Abbé. Daniel's bad life is notorious. If Annette's death had been inquired into too closely, things would have looked ugly for him; but nothing was said for the child's sake. Now, however, we can put a spoke in his wheel. We can't force him to give his daughter to Aubin; but neither can he force her to marry Yves. There remains the question of his threat to take Armelle back. That's not to be thought of—here we step in. That innocent child shall not live with La Gervaise; the law will not help Daniel there. We deprive him of his paternal

rights, hold a meeting, and make Patriarche Armelle's guardian. She lives at the farm till she is twenty-one, and then marries Aubin.'

'I see that,' said the Curé; 'but it is a terrible misfortune that both brothers have asked her in marriage on the same day. Well, we must trust in God!'

'And rely on me,' said the mayor.

On his way home the Abbé Kerdrec met poor Aubin, told him the sad story, and consoled him as best he could. He shrank from letting him know that his brother was his rival; and he advised him to go to the farm and say nothing of all this trouble.

Patriarche was full of glee; he whistled as he walked, raised Pierrot's wages, gave Baptiste a pair of shoes, and Joseph a neckerchief; Louison was presented with two jackets of russet cloth, and every beggar who came to the door received a hunch of bread and a mug of cider.

Meanwhile, Daniel was on his way to the farm. Jean Patriarche was in the garden; the straw-cutter went up to him, and said that it was his intention to take his daughter back.

'Your reasons?' asked the farmer.

'I have no reasons to give; she is my daughter, and I have the law on my side.'

'And I have all honest men on mine; so until you are armed with a legal authority, I forbid you to enter my house.'

Daniel went straight to M. Gorju, the mayor, who told him that the life he was leading deprived him of his natural rights, and that his daughter was perfectly justified in refusing to live with him. The man was furious; he entered Machecoul's tavern, where he found Yves, whom he told of Aubin's proposal to Armelle, and of his own interview with M. Gorju. Yves remained lost in thought for some time; then he said:

'You must marry La Gervaise.'

'Anything but that.'

'Send her away then.'

'I dare not; she would kill me.'

'Look here; I will give you four thousand francs instead of three the day you marry her; and you can take away Armelle the same day.'

We will not linger over the hateful compact; it was so unutterably base, that bad as both the men were they felt ashamed of it, and separated as soon as possible.

A few days later Daniel's banns were published during Mass. The Abbé Kerdrec did not fathom the plot, but he had a presentiment of misfortune.

The straw-cutter married La Gervaise, the village children hooting after them all the way home. Daniel went straight to the mayor, and said:

'Monsieur, there is nothing to prevent Armelle's return home. I mean to claim her.'

'God will judge you!' answered Gorju.

On his way to the farm he passed the Curé, and told him his errand.

‘God forgive you!’ said the priest.

Marthe had told the young girl of her father’s marriage. • Never dreaming of all it involved, she was almost glad, and said:

‘It is better so.’

They were all assembled for the midday meal, when the straw-cutter entered. Armelle trembled, Yves turned livid, Patriarche remained calm and dignified.

‘What do you want here?’ he asked.

‘I want to speak to you elsewhere,’ said Daniel. ‘Let us go into that room—is it not there that family affairs are arranged?’

The farmer and his wife entered the inner room. Jean signed to Armelle to follow.

‘The matter is this,’ said the straw cutter, ‘both your sons have asked my daughter’s hand. I refuse it to Aubin; I give it to Yves.’

‘I shall not permit Yves to marry Armelle,’ answered the farmer; ‘he is not worthy of her.’

‘And I refuse my consent to her marriage with Aubin. The child is under age, and I am come to take her with me.’

The poor girl fell on her knees, weeping convulsively.

‘You are doing a wicked thing,’ said Patriarche. ‘You have never thought about your daughter till now,



that you mean to break her heart. But I know her well ; she would die rather, than murmur, die—like her mother—with a prayer on her lips, and forgiveness in her eyes. I will take her myself to your house ; but you must give her time for her tears and farewells ; and now go, Daniel.'

The straw-cutter obeyed in silence. Then poor Armelle abandoned herself to an agony of grief. In heartrending accents she implored Marthe not to send her away to La Gervaise—to the house where her mother had died of misery. Patriarche raised her tenderly. 'My daughter,' he said, 'my heart's own child, do not give way so terribly. When the rain lays the corn, the sun raises it again. God and His angels will be with you. There is an end to everything on earth. You will be eighteen in August, then there will be three years to wait. Take courage ; they will soon pass. And there will be the Sundays—you shall always have your old place on the old bench.'

'O how good you are ! It is a heavy cross ; but I am a Christian, and my father—'

Patriarche took her in his arms : 'My daughter, we shall suffer with you ; remember that ; now dry your eyes. We will go together to the field where Pierrot hid you in the sheaf, and then to your mother's tomb to ask her to bless and watch over you.'

As they passed into the hall, he called to Aubin to come with them. Yves rose to follow, but he dared

not disobey the glance and gesture with which his father stopped him. The parents signed to Aubin and Armelle to walk on together; it was a very sad walk for them both, but Armelle was the braver of the two. When Aubin sobbed uncontrollably as they knelt by Annette's grave, the girl said: 'Listen to me, Aubin, and do not make the trouble harder for me; it is like death to me to leave the farm; but I have tried to look up to the Cross, and our Lord's Sacred Wounds. We will be true to each other, and wait. And O, Aubin, you will have Marthe; but I shall have no one. Don't make me weaker than I am; remember, the first thing is to do our duty, everywhere, always, and before all things.' Then she bent across the grave towards him, and said in a low voice: 'There is another sorrow in store for you. Remember one thing: whatever happens, however hard, however terrible, you must forgive—God commands you to do so, and I entreat you.'

'Armelle, what do you mean?'

'I can say no more; remember my words when you are tempted to revenge.'

Then she laid her hand on his forehead, as though she blessed him; and without another word left the churchyard, holding Jean's arm. When they reached Daniel's gate Armelle gave one long embrace to him and his wife, and went in; while they returned to the farm, silent and heartbroken. Armelle laid her little

bundle on a stool, and said good-evening to her father. Presently she asked where she was to sleep. 'In Blanchette's stable.' Blanchette was the goat which had been her nurse. She undid her bundle, took out some sheets, went to the stable, made an impromptu broom of some bunches of heath that lay about, swept the place, arranged a straw bed, covered it with her sheet, and went back to the house without a trace of ill-temper.

She had everything to do ; her stepmother spent her time gossiping in the village, whilst Armelle washed, cooked, and cleaned the house, with the utmost diligence and care. Only, when Sunday came, no matter what orders were given to her, she went to Mass. Her place was always kept by Marthe. After Mass she went to Annette's grave. A black cross marked it now ; and at the foot, every Sunday, she found fresh flowers which Aubin had laid there during the night. And so the days went by, and every Sunday told that another week had gone.

After a time, Armelle was forbidden by her father to join the Patriarche family at Mass ; she saw them at church, and that was all. Her chief comfort was her old friend Chantefleur ; she persisted in coming to see Armelle in spite of the rudeness and insolence of La Gervaise ; she brought her loving messages from Marthe, and tried to cheer her as much as possible.

Yves became more gloomy and irritable as the time of Armelle's majority approached—sometimes he was half mad, and felt ready to crush her under his feet. Her father too was furious with her; he had conquered Annette, but it seemed as if he could not conquer her daughter. He had insulted, beaten her—all in vain.

Never once had Yves dared to speak to his brother of the rivalry between them; he felt that everything was in Aubin's favour—his high character, his parents' affection, Armelle's love; while he himself had nothing but her unnatural father's favour. And his heart told him that Armelle would never yield.

## CHAPTER V.

### TEN LIVES FOR ONE.

ONE evening the two brothers walked together to a neighbouring village; their father wanted a tool repaired at the ploughwright's, and a new knife bought.

It was a sweet soft evening; only every now and then heavy masses of cloud hid the moon. Aubin's step was light, his heart glad; for in a few months Armelle would be free, and his wife.

'There's no need to hurry so,' said Yves; 'it is a fine night.'

Aubin slackened his pace. Then they began talking of the old tailor who was making a wedding suit

for a neighbour of theirs, of another neighbour who had taken a farm, of the fair which was just over, of the crops, and of the village girls.

‘The rose of Saint Aubin du Cormier is in no hurry to marry, it seems.’

‘Time enough,’ answered Aubin.

‘You think so, do you?’

‘Certainly I do.’

‘She has a reason for waiting, perhaps?’

Aubin made no answer.

The spade was set to rights, the knife bought, and the brothers left the shop.

‘It seems strange for us to be walking together; it does not happen often,’ said Yves.

‘Whose fault is that? I heartily wish we were more together. I have always loved you, Yves, in spite of everything.’

‘As much as Labrie or Louison?’

‘Yves, you are not just; you know very well that you have estranged yourself from us without reason.’

‘Without reason?’ And Yves turned passionately upon him. ‘I tell you there was a time in my life when a girl's hand could have led me anywhere. One look of hers was enough. If only—But no; she was afraid of me; and besides, there was one who had been beforehand with me, one who knew how to please and flatter and speak fair; a fellow without

spirit or courage, always tied to his mother's apron-string. And I was told that Armelle loved Aubin—for I mean you—the very day on which I asked her hand.'

'We could not guess that, either of us.'

'But you might have given her up! Are you to have everything—our mother's caresses and the love of the straw-cutter's daughter too? Suppose I were to say that you *must* give her up, that I *will* marry her?'

'Yves, do not let us speak of it; it does no good to either of us; and—Armelle is my betrothed.'

'I will not hear of it; you shall never marry her! Once more, will you give her up?'

'No.'

Yves seized Aubin's arm, and shook him furiously. The young man tried in vain to get free. In the struggle Yves felt in his pocket the knife which they had bought. A cloud hid the moon—there was a terrible cry—a heavy fall—the cloud passed over the moon, and the pale light showed a man rushing madly from the spot.

Later in the evening Yves went home. There were many lights about; people coming and going; there was a light too in the inner room. He entered the hall. Labrie lay, whining, in one corner; Louison was moving about with a scared face; in the next room people were talking in awe-struck whispers.

Marthe entered. 'Who is that?' she said; then, recognising Yves, 'Where did you leave your brother?'

'In the shop.'

'And where have you been since?'

'At Machecoul's.'

Bewildered with terror, she caught his hand and dragged him into the inner room.

'Swear,' she said,—'swear on this book.' He remained motionless. She bade him take off his hat, and he obeyed her mechanically. Then she fixed her eyes upon his face with an expression of horror, and leaving the room for a minute, she returned with a bowl of water in one hand, and a looking-glass in the other. A drop of blood was on his forehead. 'Stay here,' she said in an agonised whisper, 'Stay here before the Crucifix.'

She went out quickly, the doctor had come to attend to Aubin.

Returning from a wedding, Loic had seen something dark lying in the road; it was Aubin. The old man managed to carry him to the farm; and Pierrot ran for the doctor. The news spread like wild fire; and in a short time the gendarmes, the *garde champêtre*, and the Curé were in the room. The commissary of police and the magistrate had been sent for from Rennes. At length Aubin showed signs of life. Patriarche was sitting watching him at the head of the bed; Marthe at the foot, with her eyes riveted on

her son's deathlike face. No one spoke. Suddenly a sound of wheels was heard,

'It is the magistrate,' said the Abbé Kerdrec, as he entered.

'What do you want?' asked Marthe in a terrified whisper.

'There has been an attempt at murder,' was the answer, 'and there must be an investigation.'

Old Loic told his story, and produced the knife which he had drawn from the wound. Then the magistrate ascertained from Patriarche at what hour, and in whose company, and with what intention, Aubin went out; and Yves was summoned. In telling what had happened, he stated that he had left his brother at the hardware shop after the knife was bought, and that he himself had gone to the tavern; the shopkeeper, however, swore that they had gone away together.

'You see,' said the magistrate, 'the two accounts do not agree.'

Yves muttered something about his having been drinking at Machecoul's, and not remembering things clearly. Just then the doctor came in to say that Aubin had revived sufficiently to be able to speak. He was as white as the sheets in which he lay, but quite calm and collected. When all were assembled round his bed, and the magistrate had taken a chair directly opposite to him, he said:



‘Sir, and you, reverend father, and you, my dearest parents, I wish to confess my crime to you. I have made an attempt on my life.’

The magistrate started.

‘Let me tell you how it was,’ continued Aubin. ‘The straw-cutter’s daughter and I have long been betrothed; but her father will not consent to our marriage.’ He broke off suddenly; then, after a pause, he added faintly, ‘I ask pardon of you all.’

The Abbé Kerdrec laid his hand on Aubin’s forehead. Marthe hid her face in the bedclothes. The magistrate rose, saying:

‘After this I can say no more, except, indeed, this: there are crimes which escape the justice of men, but God will judge them.’

He fixed a penetrating glance, cold, clear, and keen as steel, on the face of Yves, and left the house. The doctor administered a sleeping draught to his patient, and the Abbé went to say Mass. Then the miserable parents commanded Yves to follow them to the inner room. There was an awful silence for a few minutes; then Jean Patriarche addressed his guilty son:

‘Yves, your brother has saved you, but we condemn you. Deny nothing—do not speak! You think, perhaps, that I shall shoot you, as I would a mad dog. No, for I am a Christian; but still the shedder of blood deserves death. I allow you to lose yours in an honourable calling; you must enlist to-morrow.’

Yves remained silent; the old man's head was bowed lower than that of his wretched son. He pointed to the door—'Go!' he said. Yves obeyed; and then that room, the family sanctuary, which had been the scene of the home festivals and home solemnities of four generations of good and upright men witnessed the tears and the anguish of the dishonoured parents. Jean spoke first.

'God's hand is heavy upon us,' he said; 'but it is the hand of a Father. One word from Aubin, and we must have left the country. Now, our shame and sorrow are a secret except to ourselves. All this we owe to Aubin. Ah, Marthe, Aubin will make up for everything to us.'

'And if he dies—'

'Then we must not grudge him to God.'

In the course of the day, the Abbé Kerdrec came to console them. His heart was filled with unutterable tenderness for Aubin, who did not appear to see anything heroic in his own conduct. The doctor gave good hopes of his recovery; he had doubted certainly, in examining the wound, whether the young man could have inflicted it on himself, but he did not mention his suspicions.

When Yves left the house, he did so like one in a dream. His hatred was gone; but a dull heavy weight was at his heart; thought and feeling seemed alike dead in him; he was hardly conscious of anything.

The meadows were covered with a white veil of mist; the sun rose higher in the heavens; the birds began to chirp and sing; all was fair and fresh and pure; and he was a blot, a stain on the loveliness of the morning. In the distance a withered tree stretched one bare arm, like a gallows, towards Saint Aubin du Cormier. He hurried on. Before him, in the dust of the road, were large brown stains.

‘It is blood!’ he muttered; and staggered on with a shudder.

He was wearied with his sin, without having the strength to repent. What he felt was a desire to be hidden, to be annihilated, to disappear, even if it were into the lowest hell. A low bleating struck his ear; a white goat had broken the cord which had fastened her to a tree, and was sporting near him with her kids. Yves coaxed the creature to him, fed her with some bits of bread which were in his pocket, and untied the string from her foot. There are terrible moments in which, after sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss of misery and despair, only one thing seems possible—suicide.

Yves did not reason or reflect; half unconsciously he made a running-knot in the cord; he was stunned with suffering; his brother's blood was upon him. He had escaped the sentence of the law; but conscience judged him, and his own hand must be his executioner. He managed to climb the tree high enough

to secure the cord to the great projecting branch. Then he slowly unfastened his necktie, and hid his face one moment. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

'A man must not die before he has made his peace with God.' It was the voice of the Abbé Kerdrec.

Yves fell on his knees.

'It was here, was it not? And you feel the need of expiation? I understand; and you are right—only it is not for you to choose the manner of expiation. Strike your breast, my son, and say, "God be merciful to me, the most miserable of sinners!"'

A sob burst from the wretched Yves.

'Father, forgive me,' he said. 'I have sinned—I must die! Aubin knows that I left him thinking him dead. My parents know the truth, and you, father, you know it too. There are voices in the air calling me Cain! This tree seemed to have a tongue; and it said it was a gibbet waiting for me. The blood which stains the road cries aloud like that of Abel. God's brand is on me, it will never be effaced—a stain is on my soul which nothing can cleanse. I hated Aubin because he was good and beloved. And Armelle, how I have wronged her! I made a wicked bargain with Daniel; I bribed him to give her to me. I deserve death—a thousand deaths!'

'I condemn you to something more terrible,' said the priest; 'you must live!'

Yves bowed his head to the dust. It was a strange

and solemn sight; the two men stood at the foot of the blasted tree, on the very spot where the crime of the day before had been committed; where a fresh one had been on the point of accomplishment. There was something awful in the silence which ensued. It seemed as if it would never end. The Abbé Ker-drec was praying with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, in a very agony of supplication for light and grace and pardon. At length he spoke again:

‘Yves, are you sorry for all your sins, your hatred, your crimes?’

‘I am, I am! Ask God to strike me dead here at your feet.’

‘Yves, you shall live; but you are not your own, your life is not your own. It belongs henceforth to every one in trouble, to every creature in danger of death. For the life which you wickedly tried to take you owe God ten lives. Wherever there is peril, by fire, by flood, or any other way, there is your place. Do you understand me? For your penance you shall save ten lives—the lives of ten—men, women, or children—and by the merits of the Precious Blood of Jesus, your guilt shall be washed away, and remembered no more; neither by your earthly nor your heavenly Father.’

A loud cry broke from Yves.

‘Is it true,’ he said; ‘ten lives to be saved, and then forgiveness from all?’

'All.' The priest laid his hand on the forehead of Yves. . . . 'Now rise, and go; you are reconciled with God. Complete the work of penance; obey your father, do as he bade you.'

'I will; but you know, father, in time of war a ball may strike me, and if I had not the number?'

'Come to me before you start and I will answer that question.'

'And Armelle?'

'You must get her father to consent to her marriage with your brother.'

'But the money?'

'Ask your father for it. Now go to the town, and return with your papers signed. I will go to the farm.'

The young man did not speak or move for a few minutes; then he burst suddenly into an agony of weeping, and sobbed out:

'Aubin!'

'You shall see him before you go. I promise that you shall.'

Yves caught the hand of the priest, kissed it passionately, and was gone in a moment.

It had been by a wonderful inspiration of God that the Abbé Kerdrec had laid on Yves Patriarche this work of expiation. He felt that the same energy and force of character and passions which had driven him into such terrible guilt and misery might, properly directed, make him by God's grace a Christian hero.

It was a stroke of genius ; nay, shall we not rather say a supernatural illumination ? It was one of those sublime ideas which so often originate with the humblest priests. The world passes such a one by, with a careless or supercilious glance at the worn face, the feeble hands, the frayed cassock ; but God and all great souls know what is in him.

The Abbé Kerdrec did justice to the grand old Breton farmer in feeling sure that the money question would be no difficulty. He said simply :

‘We must not expect any softening on the part of the straw-cutter yet. We must wait God’s time. There was a marriage in contemplation to which his consent had been gained by a promise of four thousand francs. Will you buy Aubin’s happiness at that price ?’

And Patriarche said to Marthe :

‘You have the key, wife ; give the money to M. le Curé.’

So the matter was settled.

Next morning the straw-cutter and his daughter were on their way to the farm. He had dressed himself with unusual care, and tried to assume an air of careless *bonhomie*, which but ill-disguised the shame which he really felt. He talked and jested with Armelle in a forced unnatural way ; but she, dear child, answered with the utmost sweetness. There was almost as much sadness as joy in her heart, but no bitterness ; when God was smoothing the way before

her, was it for her to remember the stones and brambles which once were there?

At the farm everything was strangely quiet. The servants went about their work silently; Louison had taken off her shoes for fear of disturbing her young master. Marthe never left his side; when the fever was highest, her touch soothed him; her whispered blessing, her loving kisses, always brought a smile to his pale lips. The sound of the door opening gently made her look round. Armelle entered between the priest and her father.

‘Peace be to this house!’ said the Curé

Marthe folded Armelle in a silent embrace; Aubin opened his eyes, and said to Daniel:

‘You will not take her away again?’

‘No.’

‘And you will give her to me?’

‘Yes.’

‘God is very good! Thank you, Daniel. My God, I thank Thee!’

‘And now,’ said the straw-cutter, ‘nobody wants me here; so I am off. You will let me know when the time comes for signing;’ and he left the room abruptly.

At nightfall Yves returned. Jean Patriarche had begged the Abbé Kerdrec to stay the evening. There was something so awful, so mournful, in this departure of his eldest son. It was such a terrible necessity.



It almost seemed like a secret execution. Yves came in, laid some papers on the table, and stood before his father in silence. The farmer looked them over, went out, and returned with the Book of the Gospels, which he opened, and wrote, under the date of Yves's First Communion, 'Enlisted on such a day.' The conscript read the words, and then added, with a trembling hand, 'Died the ——.' There would be only that last date to be written when the time came. He was no longer one of the family.

There was a fearful struggle in Jean's soul. He saw that there was a great change in Yves; but he did not say a word. He felt that the judge was not to be merged in the father.

Aubin had guessed what was going on by that wonderful instinct of the sick, which is like second sight. He asked Armelle to open the door, and called his brother by name. Yves started violently. The priest took his hand.

'God has forgiven you,' he said; 'go and be forgiven by your brother.'

When he came into the sick chamber, Aubin held out his hand.

'You are going away?'

'I am a soldier.'

'God bring you back safe! We will pray for you!'

Yves felt crushed; he was sinking on his knees at the foot of the bed; but Aubin held out his arms,

and clasped him in a long embrace. Then, turning to Armelle, he said, 'Good-bye, sister.' His preparations were soon made; he tied a few things in a handkerchief; refused, with a gesture, a small bag of money which his father offered him; and with one long last look at his mother, he left his home. The last scene of the family tragedy was now over.

Very slowly but steadily Aubin recovered his strength. The straw-cutter hung about the farm from time to time, to learn how he was going on. It was a regular day of rejoicing in the village when Aubin appeared for the first time in church. Père Loic had undertaken to keep Annette's grave in order; the Curé had given him some flower-seeds, and it looked like a little garden. The Calvary had not been forgotten; the Patriarche family had laid fresh bouquets on the steps.

At last the wedding-day came. Never was there a happier bridegroom nor a sweeter bride. Daniel refused to be present at the ceremony; but he lingered in the churchyard, and when his daughter came out on her husband's arm, he started as if he had seen Annette; and then, turning away with a gesture of despair, he went to drown memory and remorse in wine.

## CHAPTER VI.

## I.A TRAPPE.

YVES went straight to Rennes. Six months later, his good conduct obtained for him the permission he applied for to join the army in Italy. He distinguished himself greatly; he was something more than a gallant soldier, he was a hero. He was a model of good conduct too; and in action, wherever there was most danger, there was Yves. But there was this to be noticed in him: his most daring feats had always a touch of generosity about them. He defended rather than attacked. His one object was to save the wounded, to shelter the fallen from insult, to maintain the honour of the French flag. On one occasion a French officer, whose courage bordered on rashness, was surrounded by Austrian soldiers. Yves dashed in, carried him off through a shower of bullets, and got him safe to the ambulance; there he fell with the wounded officer—a bullet had broken his shoulder-blade. After this he was promoted. The first time he was allowed to use his hand, he wrote the word ‘one’ on a sheet of paper, and sent it to the Abbé Kerdrec. Another time he saved two children from drowning at the risk of his life. He shunned all notice after these actions, as though they were crimes; and his superior officers used to say, ‘Yves

Patriarche is a regular hero, but there never was such a bear of a fellow. After all, there's nothing like a Breton ; with a few regiments of such men we should conquer half the world.'

At the end of the campaign Yves was *sous-officier*. He refused his discharge ; danger was his passion, and he volunteered for the Chinese expedition. There too his bravery was the theme of many tongues, and his name was more than once mentioned in the despatches. He had particularly requested the Abbé Kerdrec not to write to him ; he was resolved to bear his punishment to the full ; the bitter cup should be sweetened by no hand but God's.

The chaplain of the regiment had formed a strong attachment to the brusque reserved soldier, whose silent ways he had watched ; he was interested in the man who fought like a lion, made no intimacies, and whose only passion appeared to be that of helping and saving others. French, English, Chinese—it was all the same to Yves ; one life was as good as another, and there were seven owing still.

On the field, in the trenches, anywhere and everywhere, he fought hand to hand with Death to rob him of his victims. He bore a charmed life ; often he escaped all hurt as by a miracle ; at others his injuries healed with an ease and rapidity which astonished the surgeon, who would write him a prescription or dress his wound with a smile and a shrug, intended to con-

vey that the man was sure to get found, and no thanks to him.

Alas, poor Yves ! No wonder that his self-devotion was so absolute ; it was his only relief from the anguish of memory. When the time of action was over, the ghosts of the miserable past filled his tent. The pale face of Aubin on the road in the moonlight rose before him ; the voices of the betrothed lovers again struck his ear as on the day when he heard them behind the hawthorn hedges—the day on the evening of which he had destroyed their happiness. Once more the scene changed ; this time it was the wretched hovel of the straw-cutter ; and he saw Armelle dressed in mean and ragged clothes, with her besotted father and the degraded woman he had put in her mother's place, yet unsullied by the unfit companionship, as a lily blooming on a dunghill loses nothing of its fragrance and its purity. Oaths, bad language, ill-usage—nothing could really harm her. Her duty remained ; and she bent meekly beneath that glorious yoke, as only the virtuous and holy do. But the misery she had endured was his doing ; he it was who had driven her from the happy home where she was beloved and honoured, to be the insulted victim of La Gervaise. It was too much. Had not the Abbé Kerdrec deceived him when he assured him of forgiveness in the name of God ? Were not his crimes past all pardon ? And as the gibbet-like tree

rose before his imagination, he seemed to himself like Judas, when, rushing in his hopeless remorse from the assembly of the priests, he came upon the executioner fashioning the cross.

And all this misery was aggravated by the respect of his superior officers, by the affection of the chaplain.

'What am I,' he cried in the bitterness of his soul, 'but an assassin and a thief? If they knew the truth, they would scorn and hate me—they would shun me as one stricken with the plague—they would point at me as a monster of wickedness. The general would tear the cross from my button-hole. Praise, respect, affection—it is all stolen. I will wear this hideous mask of hypocrisy no longer.'

One day the chaplain, the Abbé Florent, found him sitting alone in the tent. He had a book in his hand, but he was not reading; his lips moved as though he were repeating something he had learned by heart.

'My friend,' said the priest gently.

'I do not deserve to have a friend,' answered Yves.

'Yet you greatly need one.'

'I do, and I do not.'

'Explain yourself, Yves.'

'A friend—a real friend—should be our second self.'

'Quite true.'

'And we should have no secrets from him.'

'Not when it is possible.'

'It *must* be possible,' said the soldier gloomily.

'Not always, Yves. When the wound is scarred—'

'And if it is a shameful one?'

'No matter, if God has healed it.'

'A friend?' Yves burst out passionately 'I have none; I never shall have one—it is impossible. My comrades like me, they are good fellows; but do I make friends with them? Is there any confidence between us? At the canteen, by the bivouac fire, I keep aloof. Alone—always alone. You will say that is my fault, my choice. Yes, father, because it must be so. I have one thing to do—a task which is laid upon me—and I devote myself to it. But that is not enough for me. There are many sorts of expiation; I must go through them all.'

'My poor fellow!' said the priest gently.

'Do you know what I was reading when you came in? It was the Bible. Shall I go on reading aloud?'

'Go on,' said the chaplain.

Yves began, and as he read drops of agony beaded his forehead:

'Cain said to his brother, Let us go forth abroad. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him.'

'And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is thy brother Abel? And he answered, I know not; am I my brother's keeper?'

'And He said to him, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to Me from the earth.

'Now, therefore, cursed shalt thou be upon the earth, which hath opened her mouth, and received the blood of thy brother at thy hand.

'When thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit: a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth.

'And Cain said to the Lord, My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.

'Behold, Thou dost cast me out this day from the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from Thy face: and I shall be a vagabond and a fugitive on the earth; every one, therefore, that findeth me shall kill me.

'And the Lord said to him, No, it shall not be so: but whosoever shall kill Cain shall be punished seven-fold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain.'

Yves read these verses slowly, in a low stifled voice; and when he had done so, he put down the book, told his own history to the priest, and then, looking into his face, exclaimed:

'Now you know why I cannot die. I attempted the life of my brother; and God has set a mark upon



me, and Death will not strike 'me. Now you see why I can never have a friend. You thought well of me, father; but I have been a bad son, an unnatural brother; even as a child, I was called "wicked Yves." On a certain day, father, our curé told me to 'save ten lives, and promised me God's forgiveness. And that is my work. But I begin to think my burden is too heavy for me. Death—death—that is all I long for.'

The Abbé Florent clasped him in his arms. 'My friend, my brother!' he said.

'Your friend—your brother—after what I have told you?'

'Yves,' continued the chaplain, 'you must let me read your inmost soul now. I can heal all its wounds.'

He shook his head.

'You think that is impossible?'

'I am sure it is.'

'Tell me, Yves, what do you want? what is in your mind?'

'It is not the present, but the future, that I am thinking of.'

'And what do you wish to do in the future?'

'To lead a life of silence, solitude, and prayer. To live with good and holy men, who would know my history, and yet let me be with them. To be the lowest of all, the servant of all, and to feel that God has forgiven me. To drink the chalice of humilia-

tion to the very dregs, and to satisfy the justice, the implacable justice of God.'

'A merciful justice, Yves, do not forget that.'

'Yesterday,' he went on, 'I was so happy as to save three little children, whom the Sisters of Charity have received. That makes eight lives saved in five years; the number will be soon made up, please God, and then—what shall I do?'

'First go back to your home.'

'Go back! I!'

'For a time. First of all, go to your good Curé, and tell him that your penance is accomplished; then go to your father's farm.'

'Go there and see them again!—all of them?' murmured the soldier.

'Yes, all. Your parents, to get them forgiveness, Aubin—that good Aubin—to make him happy.'

'And Aimelle—'

'To see her your brother's happy wife.'

'True; that is a part of the penance.'

'And then—'

'Yes, then—'

'Then you shall leave Saint Aubin du Cormier, and go to Morbihan. Go to the Abbey of Thyma-deuc, and ask to see the Abbot of La Trappe. Tell him everything; speak to him as openly as you have just spoken to me, and ask to be received as a lay brother. You will be able to make a confession of

your whole life before them all; and to realise the longing you have just expressed—that of living with holy men acquainted with your sad history.'

'You are saving me!' exclaimed Yves.

'I have shown you a safe harbour, but one which is not without its labours and storms. There will be every kind of hard penance—everything to subject the flesh to the spirit: absolute silence, trying fasts, wearisome watchings. There will be everything to tear the heart from earth, and fix it on heaven; everything to confound human wisdom, to annihilate the will, to break the heart, to exalt the soul by humbling it, and to purchase eternal happiness at the price of daily martyrdom. That will be your life, and it is a hard one.'

'The innocent and good accept it. Shall I complain?'

From that day Yves was a different man. The future, which had been so terrible because it was vague and undefined, lay before him now in a tangible shape. His thoughts dwelt on that severe life of labour and penance with love and longing. To live by dying daily—that was the life for him.

The army returned to France, and Yves got his discharge. Tears were in his eyes when he took leave of the Abbé Florent, promising to write to him. Then he started on foot for Saint Aubin du Cormier. Two comrades were with him, who belonged to

neighbouring villages. Yves was *décoré*, and wore a medal for each of his glorious campaigns.

When the three soldiers reached Rennes it was night, but Yves was anxious to get on; and as his friends would not leave him, they continued their march across fields and commons. Suddenly, heavy dark masses swept across the sky, then lurid red ones; the air felt heavy and stifling. 'It is a fire,' said one of the men. They set off running in the direction of the flames, crossing fields, leaping hedges and ditches. As they approached, they could distinguish the burning buildings, the crackling of the flames, and the fall of masses of wood.

The fire had begun in a barn, and the terrified inmates were surprised in their sleep.

'Come on, my lads!' cried Yves; 'it is not worse than the fire of a battery. Follow me, heroes of Pekin and the Tchernaya!'

Just as they dashed into the burning house, people were talking of a helpless old man, who slept in a shed adjoining a pigeon-house, which gave admission to the fire through numerous openings, and of some one who had climbed on the roof to get to the old man, and been seen no more. No one knew who he was, but all said he was a gallant fellow, and that no doubt he would lose his life in his generous attempt.

It was a strange and horrible confusion; the la-

mentations of the poor people whose property was being destroyed, the wailing of children, the sound of axes, the creaking of the bucket-chain, as water was drawn from the well, mingling with the shouts of the workmen and the vociferations of the crowd.

Yves had climbed up to the pigeon-house, and gone in. On the threshold, close to the staircase, which the flames had all but reached, lay two bodies—two corpses, doubtless—suffocated by the smoke.

Yves lifted up one—the oldest—seized the other by the hand, and so, laden with this double burden, carrying one, dragging the other, he struggled, panting, up the quivering staircase, blinded by the smoke, enveloped in flames, and feeling as though he were drinking draughts of fire. At the top, he sank down with his burden, faintly murmuring ‘Ten!’

The three men—none could tell whether they were living or dead—were carried, senseless, burnt and blackened, to a place of safety; women threw water on their faces, and tried to revive them.

The Abbé Kerdrec approached the group. The old man remained insensible; the man who had been the first to hasten to his rescue was slowly recovering.

‘Aubin, my son!’ cried the priest.

The young man tried to rise.

‘Armelle! Tell Armelle and the children.’

‘We have sent for her; and the poor old man is beginning to come to at last.’

‘O, thank God! My head swam, and I made sure of death. How was it? Who saved me?’

‘Our comrade,’ said the two soldiers, who had joined the party. ‘It is the way with this fellow, wherever he goes.’

The Abbé Kerdrec bent over the *sous-officier*. He had not at first recognised the blackened disfigured face, but at the words of the soldiers a thought flashed into his mind.

‘Can it be possible?’ he said; and he put back the tangled hair from his forehead, and looked long and earnestly at him. Then he turned to Aubin, and said in a faltering voice: ‘My son, do you know who it is that has saved your life? It is Yves—your brother.’

Aubin jumped up and threw his arms round the fainting soldier. ‘Yves—my brother! Yes, he lives; his heart beats. And look, father, the cross of honour! Yves—dear Yves—my own brother! don’t you know us, Aubin and M. le Curé? O, to think of our mother’s happiness!’

Yves could not take it all in yet; but he felt himself embraced by strong and loving arms; he heard voices that were music in his ears; and he closed his eyes, wondering if it was all a dream—the danger, the pain, and the gladness.

Presently he regained full consciousness. Day was breaking, and he looked around, first at one, and then

at another. When he saw the Curé, he caught both his hands, exclaiming, 'Ten, father, ten !'

'And do you know who the tenth is, my son?'

'No; there was an old man, and a strong young one, half suffocated, I think. No, I don't know their names; I don't even know where I am; but that is no matter. Ten, at last, and God is satisfied !'

'And do you still doubt His forgiveness?'

'I *must* believe in it.'

'Yes, Yves, you must; for here is the proof, and the pledge of pardon. My son, here is the man you have just saved.'

Then Yves knew he had saved his brother's life.

It was a moment not to be described. The brothers held each other in a long embrace; weeping, trembling, murmuring broken words of love and tenderness which cannot be written down, but which the heart easily understands. Then Aubin took his brother home; the Curé followed with the two soldiers. You may imagine how he drank in their accounts of the heroic actions of their comrade. Never had the good Abbé Kerdrec thanked God as he did that day.

They were in sight of the farm now. The men were about their work. Armelle stood at the door, with a child in her arms, and another at her side. She was looking anxiously down the road: the group had just reached the turning. She ran on. Aubin met her, and took her hand: 'Armelle, you

are the first to welcome our dear brother Yves, who has just saved my life.' Then there were the children to be looked at; and after a few minutes they all went towards the farm. Yves trembled as the meeting with his father drew near. The old man came forward. Without hesitating, Armelle went up to him, saying, as she put her arms round his neck 'It is Yves, father; he has saved Aubin; we owe him everything.' Then all turned away with a feeling of awe, as the father embraced his repentant son. We will not attempt to describe that moment, still less the mother's feelings. The excitement at the farm, in the village, may be imagined. Every one was pressed to eat, but no one was hungry, except the two soldiers, who had certainly a good appetite. Poor old Louison limped about, waiting on every one. Old Loic hastened up to see the hero of the village, and one after another followed him, full of pride and delight, till every one had had a good look at him; and I should be afraid to say how many times the soldiers had to tell their comrade's history.

It was all positive torture to Yves; but he bore it for his father's sake; and besides, it would be over soon. God had been very good, and the goal was very nearly reached.

The following Sunday, after Vespers, he asked for a private interview with his father, and the old man went with him into the inner room. He opened the



Book of the Gospels, and showed his son where, in a few simple words, the story of the fire was told. Then Yves knelt down; he insisted on speaking to his father in that attitude. They talked long and earnestly. More than once Jean Patriarche hid his tears on his son's shoulders; more than once the young man's voice was broken by emotion. Then the peace of God sank into their hearts, and there was a great calm as Jean solemnly blessed Yves.

Next morning, the farmer, dressed for a journey, was waiting, surrounded by his family, while Yves received his mother's parting kisses. Aubin was making a last appeal.

'Why should you leave us?' he said. 'Could you not make yourself happy here amongst us all? Why must you grieve me and break our mother's heart? Is not this your proper place—your home? Where are you going?'

And his father answered: 'I am going to take your brother to Thymadeuc, to the abbey of La Trappe.'

Then Aubin made the sign of the cross, and said no more. The last embraces were given in silence; there was a sense of God's presence in the house; and Patriarche and his son went out slowly and silently. Yves turned round just once to kiss his hand to Marthe, and then the only sounds were the heavy steps of Jean Patriarche, the sobs of Marthe, and the tender voice of Armelle trying to comfort her.

THE  
**Picture in my Uncle's Dining-room.**

A TALE OF  
**FRENCH SOCIETY UNDER THE OLD REGIME.**

BY MADAME CHARLES REYBAUD.

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*Translated from the French.*



THE  
Portrait in my Uncle's Dining-room.

CHAPTER I.

DOM GERUSAC AND HIS COUNTRY-HOUSE.

DURING my college life, rather more than thirty years ago, I used annually to spend a part of my holidays with an uncle of my mother's at a pretty country house in Upper Provence, a few leagues from the Piedmontese frontier. This uncle of mine was a Benedictine, wonderfully learned, and devoted to his books. It was generally agreed that he would have been one of the glories of the celebrated Congregation of St. Maur, if the Revolution had not driven him from his monastery just as he had completed his novitiate.

Dom G rusac, as he was still called in his family, was only about twenty-five years old when the decree was issued which suppressed all the Religious Communities in France. He did not take advantage of this circumstance to mix with the world again, nor did

he, on the other hand, endeavour to return to the Religious life by retaining, like most of the members of his Order, the habit of St. Benedict in a Spanish or Italian monastery. When the storm of the Revolution had in some measure subsided, he collected together the remains of his paternal inheritance, and took refuge in a little obscure corner of the earth, to which he gave the high-sounding name of St. Pierre de Corbie, in remembrance of the famous House where the first studious years of his youth had been spent. This little property was concealed, as it were, in a bend of the Alps, on the southern slope of the chain of mountains which gradually descends to the mouth of the Var. It was a wild but yet a cheerful site. The house stood on a little eminence, behind which rose a ridge of immense rocks, on the steep sides of which grew some fine tufts of Spanish chestnuts, whilst its deep crevices were filled with a multitude of shrubs. The approach to it was by a winding road, bordered with willows and poplars, forming on both sides a transparent curtain of foliage, through which could be seen fields, olive-groves, and long trellised alleys of vines, which looked like green ribbons of curious hues unrolled on the chalky soil.

The diligence used to set me down on the high-road at about a good league's distance from my uncle's house, and I then followed on foot the narrow lane into which no *voiturier*, or coachman, had ever ha-

zarded his vehicle. • I was delighted to make my way along this unfrequented path, carrying my slender stock of clothes tied in a handkerchief, and with a travelling stick in my hand, as if I had been a workman on his tour through France.

I hastened my steps as I drew nearer, until at last, at the entrance of the avenue, coming to a standstill, I looked about me with a delight I can hardly describe, for each stony bank, each tree, each little rivulet making its way through the thick grass, seemed like an old friend. It was always the same peaceful, charming, well-known picture. The house, with its white walls and red-tiled roof, over which a wreath of blue smoke curled gracefully upward, then a little below the house the garden, green and gay as in the spring, and close to it the orchard, with its fruit-trees bending beneath their load of red apples and violet-coloured plums. And beyond this fair home-scene rose the beautiful mountains, crowned with forests of oak, and their sides dotted with white sheep, the sound of whose bleating was faintly heard in the distance.

My good old uncle always met me with open arms, and his first question invariably was, 'My dear boy, do you come loaded with University honours?' And when I informed him of my successes, he never failed to congratulate me in a set Latin speech. After which he would notice my heated, tired appearance,

and hurrying me into the little sitting-room on the ground-floor, he called his old servant Marian, and desired her to bring me a glass of sugared wine, and to take my bundle up-stairs.

The sight of Marian was the only drawback to my enjoyment in arriving at this lovely place. She was certainly the ugliest creature I ever set eyes on. There was something grim, sulky, and disagreeably old about her looks, which I can hardly describe, but that made her singularly repulsive. I could never get over my aversion to this woman. When I was a little fellow of eight or nine years old, I did not venture to look Marian in the face, and later on I could never see her without thinking of the characters in infernal legends. Her stiff figure, bony hands, blood-shot eyes, and innumerable wrinkles, always reminded me of the stories about vampires and ghouls. But I am bound to add that she was an excellent servant, active, attentive, obedient, and so little given to talking that she never seemed of her own accord to open her lips.

My uncle had furnished his rooms with the becoming simplicity and substantial comfort of some of the ancient Religious Houses. Marian excepted, everything about him had a cheerful pleasant aspect. The little saloon where he habitually sat was furnished in particular with an unpretending elegance which did not at first strike the eye, but by degrees its peculiar

character attracted notice. Everything in it was adapted for a quiet, peaceful, studious mode of life. Comfortable armchairs, noiselessly rolling on castors, seemed to gather of their own accord round the chimney, where, as early as September, a bright little fire of vine fagots was lighted in the evening. Vases of Japan china, always filled with fresh flowers, decorated the corners of the room, and each frame of the gray wainscoted walls was enlivened by a landscape painting of some historical scene. A door, which was generally ajar, opened into the library, the shelves of which were enriched with all the bibliographic treasures my uncle had collected. There, in fair array, were to be seen a profane tribe of Latin authors, the learned host of the Benedictines of St. Maur, and a crowd of less illustrious writers, who have devoted their time to the study of our national records. A few wandering poets had strayed into the midst of these huge folios, and their gorgeous bindings glittered here and there on the dusky shelves. The saloon was adorned with several paintings, and a curious old set of engravings, much prized by my uncle. On the walnut-wood sideboard stood some ancient pieces of plate of exquisite workmanship. But I must own that none of these curiosities attracted me half as much as a portrait which Dom Gêrusac had hung up over the pier-glass of the chimneypiece. It was a drawing in coloured pencils, faded by time, and set in



a frame, once a handsome one, but now damaged in several places. This picture represented a woman in the full bloom of the most radiant youth and beauty, and dressed in the style of one of Watteau's shepherdesses—a trimming of pink ribbons ornamented the long stiff painted bodice, which supported her round and slender waist. Two broad black-velvet bands, worn like bracelets, encircled her beautiful arms, which were bare up to the elbow, and her powdered hair was tied up with bows of a pale blue. There was something wonderfully captivating about that face, a mixture of softness and brilliancy in those tender and slightly prominent blue eyes. A half smile seemed to hover over lips which disclosed teeth of the purest enamel; that little mouth was like a pomegranate flower, into whose chalice jasmine blossoms had fallen.

My place at table was just opposite the chimney, and I could not raise my eyes without seeing this enchanting creature, who seemed to gaze on me with the most bewitching sweetness; but when I looked down and saw Marian, with her crabbed hideous face, standing bolt-upright behind Dom Gêrusac's arm-chair, ready to change our plates and wait upon us, I could not get over this contrast, and it served to increase my antipathy to the old woman. I might have been more easily reconciled to her repulsive ugliness, if I had not had so often before my eyes the ideal beauty of that

incomparable face. As to my uncle, he looked upon most things with the indifference of a saint and of a scholar. I am sure it had never occurred to him to take notice of Marian's appearance. I ventured to ask him one day if he ever remembered her less wrinkled and shrivelled than she then was. He thought a little, and then said, 'No, upon my word I don't. Do you think she is very old? I suppose she must be about my own age—sixty or thereabouts'

And, when I exclaimed at this, he added, 'I should not be surprised if she were younger. There are people who appear old long before their time. It strikes me that for the last ten years that she has been in my service she has always looked much as she does now. At any rate, she is as strong and active as a young girl.'

Dom Gêrusac lived quite secluded from the world, and kept up little correspondence, except with the learned societies to which he forwarded the results of his labours, and received at his house only a few members of his family who from time to time came to see him. A good old priest, the Abbé Lambert, was the only habitual visitor at St. Pierre de Corbie. Once a week during the holidays I used to see him arrive, with his worn-out cassock tucked up in his pockets, his Breviary under his arm, and a thick stick in his hand. He was Curé of the parish of Malpeire, on the confines of which my uncle's property was

situated, and I would venture to affirm that this worthy man was the poorest priest in France. His parishioners were scattered over a vast tract of thickly-wooded land, intersected by deep valleys and often impassable torrents. The village of Malpeire, situated nearly in the centre of the parish, contained scarcely more than a hundred inhabitants, but from the size of the surrounding walls, and the number of houses crumbling into ruins, it was easy to see that its population must have formerly been far more considerable. The church, which, with its gothic spire, still towered over all the neighbouring country, was a vast building, bearing traces of ancient splendour; magnificent stained-glass windows adorned the chancel, and mutilated pieces of sculpture and broken picture-frames denoted the places where works of art had once existed.

The village of Malpeire was about a league distant from St. Pierre, on the other side of a high mountain, which we crossed every Sunday on our way to Mass, for although Dom Gêrusac had long since given up the observances of a monastic life, he practised all the ordinary duties of a Christian. As often happens in these Alpine countries, we on the southern slope of the mountain enjoyed a mild and equable temperature, whereas frequent storms burst upon the higher lands, and the cold was sensibly felt in that part of the parish. We accordingly took precautionary measures

before ascending to those regions. Marian went on before us, carrying our cloaks, and waited for us at the entrance of a gorge which divided the summit of the mountain, and across which a current of icy air was almost always blowing.

The old servant carried also in a basket our breakfast, and in a wallet slung over her shoulder my uncle's offerings for the poor. She insisted on conveying these things in this way, instead of strapping them on the back of the quiet little donkey Dom Gêrusac rode. We generally made a halt on reaching the above-mentioned gorge. This spot went by the name of the pass of Malpeire. It had a wild sombre aspect which particularly took my fancy. The rock, apparently cleft by an antediluvian convulsion, exhibited a rent both sides of which were almost perpendicular. The black jagged points of its double crest rose overhead in sharp and clear outline against the pale blue sky, and the bottom of this precipice was hidden by a multitude of plants and shrubs, which under their intricate tissue concealed unfathomed abysses. The pathway ran between the bare rock on one side and these masses of verdure on the other. Beneath the green surface roared the rapid waters of a brawling torrent. This road became impracticable in winter, when the snow concealed the inequalities of the ground, but in summer nothing could be pleasanter than to walk in the shade of these huge rocks, enjoying the delicious

coolness rising from that ocean of foliage alongside the narrow pathway. An immense mass of rocks stood at the entrance of this defile, and jutted like a promontory above the wild uneven tract of land on the northern side of the mountain. On the summit of this sort of crest, the steep and barren sides of which overshadowed the village, rose the dilapidated walls and ruined towers of the castle of Malpeire.

When we reached the mouth of the gorge, Marian rose from the seat at the foot of the road where she was in the habit of waiting for us, and came forward to assist Dom G rusac to dismount ; then, producing our cloaks, she threw them over our shoulders, and forthwith proceeded on her way, leading the donkey by the bridle.

‘ Really,’ my uncle would say, as he followed her with his eyes, ‘ that good woman has the legs of an ostrich, which runs, they say, at the rate of seven leagues an hour. There, see, she is already out of sight.’

‘ So much the better,’ I mentally exclaimed, for to my mind Marian disfigured the prospect. I hated the sight of this antiquated shepherdess in her Sunday clothes, with her heavy shoes, her frightful black-straw hat cocked up on her old gray top-knot, and her loose print gown with the sleeves cut short at the elbow, leaving her bare arms exposed to view.

When she had disappeared, I walked more lei-

surely along the little winding path, enjoying the wild beauty of that magnificent scenery. Each time I came there I felt more struck with the picture which met my eyes at the furthest extremity of the defile. The ruins of the ancient feudal castle frowned above us, and at the foot of the gigantic rocks on which they rested stood the old church, with the houses of the village irregularly grouped around it. In the midst of a large open space in front of the sacred edifice were two elm trees, linked together by their interweaving branches, so as to form in appearance a single tree with two large trunks. They had not their equal for size and beauty in the whole country. Beyond the hamlet an extensive tract of undulating ground was spread out, over which the eye wandered without taking cognisance of any particular details. It would almost have seemed as if, in some strange convulsion of nature, the land had been thrown about in wild heaving confusion, and then suddenly resolved itself into a sea of mountains, an ocean of motionless waves.

The ruins which overlooked this rugged expanse formed an imposing pile of buildings, displaying the architectural features of several different epochs. Dom G rusac had taken care to point out to me the various characteristics of those successive eras. According to him, Roman legions had once encamped on the broad terrace in front of the castle. The encircling walls dated from feudal times, whereas the

elaborate ornaments still to be seen on the frontage of two elegant pavilions on each side of the building betokened a comparatively modern erection. In any case, nothing could be more desolate than the aspect of these roofless dilapidated structures. I had sometimes questioned my uncle as to the former lords of the domain of Malpeire, but he had never studied the local traditions of the place, and the sort of answer my inquiries generally met with was that the history of these great families was a perfect chaos. Not, indeed, that documents on the subject were altogether wanting; there were some very valuable ones in the cartulary of the church of St. Maur which he happened himself to possess. He had come across a title in that book which went clearly to prove that Ferrand, seventeenth baron of Malpeire, was one of the sixteen Provençal lords who accompanied Godfrey de Bouillon to the Holy Land. He intended some day to write a memoir on the subject, and he would give it me to read. But whilst the chronicle of the crusader was progressing, I made in the mean while an effort to induce Marian to relate to me the more recent history of the country. One day, as we were going to Malpeire, I overtook her at the entrance of the pass, and instead of getting out of her way as I usually contrived to do, I boldly made an attempt at conversation.

‘What a beautiful morning it is!’ I said as I came

up to her; 'I feel as active as a chamois, and have walked so fast that I have left my uncle a long way behind. May I sit down by you till he comes up?' She made room for me on the ledge of the rock, but turned her head away in her usual ungracious manner, and began to rummage in her basket, evidently in order to avoid speaking to me. But nowise daunted, I began again: 'How many years have you trudged along this road, my dear Marian? Don't you find it sometimes very long and tiring for your poor legs?'

'No, sir,' she replied, in that abrupt and sharp tone which is peculiar to ill-tempered old women.

I still persevered. 'Before the Revolution there was a fine castle on that height,' I said, pointing to the ruins. 'Were you ever there in those times, I mean when it was inhabited by its ancient lords?' As she made no answer, I civilly added, 'You must have been very young then.'

'So young that I recollect nothing about it,' she growled out in a surly manner, and gathering up her bundle and her wallet she went to meet my uncle.

This reply seemed to me a funny bit of pretension on Marian's part, who must have evidently reached years of discretion at the time when the old *régime* came to an end. Without any better success, I cross-examined the Abbé Lambert; it was only since the Restoration that he had been appointed Curé of Malpeire. As to the peasants, they knew nothing of the



local history of their districts, and troubled themselves very little about the occurrences of former times. As to the rising generation, I have no doubt they would have been puzzled to say if thirty years or thirty centuries had elapsed since the castle of the Barons of Malpeire had been destroyed.

Once, however, as I was standing in the shade before the church door, a little peasant directed my attention to the elm-trees, and said, with evident complacency,

‘Did you ever see two finer trees than those, sir, so straight and tall, and so covered with leaves? I have been told that the like of them is not to be found in all Provence, or even much farther.’

‘They do not seem to be very old,’ I answered, gazing upwards at the interwoven branches which formed abovehead an impervious roof of foliage.

‘O, as to that,’ the lad replied, ‘who can tell how many years it is since those trees were planted and christened?’

‘Christened! what do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Yes, sir, christened; for that one is called Monsieur le Marquis and this one Monsieur le Baron.’

‘And why, my boy?’ I again added.

‘O, why,’ he answered, shrugging his shoulders, as if to say, ‘Who cares?’ ‘I never heard *why*; it was so long ago that I suppose nobody knows.’

## CHAPTER II.

## A VISIT FROM MY UNCLE'S SCHOOLFELLOW.

I HAVE already said that there was a picture in my uncle's drawing-room which had strangely taken my fancy. It hung over an old looking-glass, which had the property of imparting a frightfully green hue to the unhappy faces reflected in it. There likewise stood on the chimneypiece two little cups of Sèvres china embellished with ciphers and miniature wreaths, perfect gems—into which Marian ruthlessly stuck her matches. I don't know why I had taken it into my head that the picture, the looking-glass, and the cups had all come from the same house, and that the person represented in the picture had often looked at herself in the mirror and touched with her coral lips the edges of the pretty cups. This notion having once taken possession of my mind, I was seized with an ardent curiosity on the subject, and framed all sorts of fanciful conjectures, worthy of figuring in the pages of a novel. By degrees a singular feeling grew out of this fancy. By dint of gazing on that portrait, I really fell in love with it, and experienced the agitations and emotions incident to that passion. All the little ornaments which adorned the chimneypiece became to me objects of interest. I looked upon them with a kind of mysterious reverence. Marian's matches I

threw away, and filled their places every day with the most beautiful flowers. Little did Dom Gêrusac imagine when he saw me buried in his folios, as he fondly imagined, with my elbows resting on my desk, that I was all the time lost in dreams about this beauty, who only existed on canvas, and composing verses in her praise. I can only plead in extenuation of this folly that I was seventeen years of age, and had just finished my course of rhetoric.

In the midst of my intense internal agitation I maintained sufficient self-command to conceal the emotion I went through in consequence of this extravagant and romantic fancy. The mere idea that anybody could suspect its existence made me feel dreadfully ashamed. But in the mean time my unsatisfied curiosity became quite a torment. I conjured up the most extraordinary suppositions as to the name and history of the lovely creature who had sat for her picture probably a hundred years ago as if on purpose to be the delight and the plague of my life.

It would have been easy enough to clear up the matter by putting a direct question to my uncle; but I could not bear to talk to him about it, I was so afraid of betraying my unaccountable interest in the subject. One day, however, when we were at dinner, my courage suddenly rose, and pretending to laugh as I looked up at the glass,

‘O, my dear uncle,’ I exclaimed, ‘what a funny

sort of looking-glass that is ! It makes people's faces seem as if they were made of green wax.'

'But it is, nevertheless, a very pretty piece of furniture,' Dom Gêrusac replied ; 'the frame, if you notice, is of ebony, inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl. It is a pity that the top has been unfortunately knocked off. I suppose the arms of the family, with supporters and a crest, used to be there. I found that glass in a broker's shop at D——, as well as the picture which hangs over it, and those little Sèvres cups, all jumbled up together with bits of old rusty iron.'

My heart beat very fast, and I said in a strangled voice, 'I suppose those things came out of some great house sacked at the time of the Revolution ?'

'Most likely,' my uncle replied ; 'but there is no mark by which we can guess who may have been the owners of this old rubbish, as you young gentlemen are apt to call everything not in the newest fashion.' Dom Gêrusac had turned round to look at the things he was speaking of, and pointing to the portrait he said, 'And that frame, Frederic, is a very pretty one too. Don't you think so ?'

'That portrait,' I exclaimed, 'O, yes !'

'Dear me, no ; not the portrait,' he cried. 'It is half rubbed out, and in very bad drawing ; but the frame is really very handsome. Some day I mean to have it cleaned and repaired, and I shall then give the

picture to Marian. She may nail it up in her bedroom by the side of the print of the 'Wandering Jew.'

This speech made me shudder, but I did not venture to ask my uncle to give me the object of my romantic worship. I made up my mind to see it pass into Marian's hands, with the hope that it would be possible later on to buy it of her.

Meanwhile my uncle received a letter which filled him with delight and turned upside-down his quiet little household. A great personage and distinguished diplomate, the Marquis de Champaubert, French ambassador at a foreign court, had written to Dom Gêrusac to say that, as he was to pass through Toulon on his way to his post, he should turn aside from his road to pay him a visit, and renew their old friendship.

My uncle forthwith summoned his privy council, that is to say, he called Marian and communicated to her the news he had received. 'Let every one set to work,' he enjoined. 'Desire Babelou to get the blue bedroom ready, and do you devote yourself to the kitchen. M. de Champaubert will be here to-morrow. Everything must be ready in good time. You will, I am sure, take particular pains about the dinner. There are some dishes you excel in—a pigeon-pie, for instance. Try and let us have one to-morrow; and give us some *œufs à la neige*, and some roast chickens. In short, whatever you can think of that will be nicest.'

'I will do my best,' Marian replied in her short

manner, and without waiting for farther instructions she returned to the kitchen.

'That dear good Maximin,' my uncle said, turning to me, 'how glad I shall be to see him! He is my oldest friend. We began our studies together at the Oratorians'; but I was intended for St. Maur, and so two years afterwards I went to La Chaise Dieu. Champaubert asked leave to go there with me. He had no vocation for the religious life, but he was a good scholar and had a decided taste for the classics. His family had wished him to be a priest, but his elder brother happening to die before he had finished his studies, he reëntered the world before he could be said to have left it. I was just going to begin my novitiate when he left La Chaise Dieu. It was on All Saints' Day. I can see him now, in his blue coat and round American hat, taking leave of us at the entrance door, just before mounting his horse. O, he was a famous horseman, and so good-looking !'

'Was that a very long time ago?' I foolishly asked.

'Well,' said my uncle, 'stop a moment.' It was in 1787; therefore thirty-five years must have elapsed since those days. I have never seen Champaubert since, nor heard much about him except through the newspapers. He emigrated in the early days of the Revolution, and did not return to France till the peace. Since then, his talents and fidelity have met with their

reward. The king has heaped honours and distinctions on him. He is a peer of France, an ambassador, and has I don't know how many titles and dignities. May God prosper him ! He is worthy of his good fortune.'

The idea of finding myself in the presence of this great man, and of being presented to him, kept me awake all the night, and the first thing I did in the morning was to go and stand on the terrace to watch for his arrival. I was greatly perplexed to think how his Excellency's carriage and horses would manage to get through our cross-road, with all its ruts and holes, and I felt also no little anxiety about the reception which was in course of preparation for him. It seemed to me quite out of keeping with so distinguished a guest. I concluded, of course, that he travelled with a numerous suite, and I pictured to myself the figure which our old servant would cut in the midst of all those fine people. I felt myself getting hot in the face as I thought of her coming boldly into the drawing-room, with her napkin on her arm, sticking herself behind Dom Gêrusâc's chair, or pouring out wine for his guest with that frightful clawlike hand of hers.

In the afternoon, Babelou, the little maid who helped in the kitchen, made her appearance at the end of the terrace, and screamed to me in her most shrill voice, 'M. Frederic, come; the gentleman is arriving; he is there in the avenue.'

‘Where is his carriage? Which way did he come?’ I asked, quite puzzled. ‘It must have been upset in a ditch.’

• ‘His carriage!’ cried Babelou, laughing. ‘Why, it is like your uncle’s carriage—it can go along any road where a donkey can set its four feet!’

And so it was! The Ambassador was actually riding up to the door on a small ass, caparisoned in the fashion of the country, with a pad stuffed with straw, and no stirrups; his whole suite consisting of a peasant, who carried his portmanteau, and drove the ass before him with a hazel-bough.

M. de Champaubert sprang nimbly to the ground, and threw his arms about my uncle’s neck. The good old man fairly wept for joy, and faltered out as he clasped his friend’s hand, ‘Well, I had never hoped for this. It is too great a happiness, monseigneur.’

‘What do you mean by monseigneur?’ the Marquis exclaimed, taking his arm. ‘Call me Maximin, as you used to do. Do you know, my dear Thomas, that I knew you again at once?’

‘So did I you,’ my uncle replied; ‘you are not the least altered.’

‘Come, come,’ rejoined the Marquis with a smile, ‘a little snow has fallen here since we last parted.’ And he ran his fingers through his gray hairs.

‘If your letter had only reached me one day sooner,’ my uncle said, ‘I should have gone to meet



you at C——. You must have been rather puzzled to find your way here.'

'O, not the least!' his Excellency replied. 'I left my carriage on the high-road, and went in search of a donkey and a boy to bring me here. I found what I wanted at a farmhouse close by.'

'But who had described to you the road you were to take?' my uncle asked.

'Nobody,' replied his friend. 'I know this country. I have been here before.' And he looked around him at the valley and the mountains.

'After you had left La Chaise Dieu?'

'About two years afterwards.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Dom G rusac. 'How did it happen that I never heard of it?'

M. de Champaubert smiled somewhat sadly, and lowering his voice, answered, 'You were at St. Pierre de Corbie, just about to make your vows. There were things at that time I did not feel as if I could write to you about.'

'Why not, I wonder?' my uncle said in his kind simple manner.

I stood a little apart in silent amazement; I could not persuade myself that I had before my eyes a man who represented the King of France, and was in the habit of speaking to crowned heads. At first sight, our guest might have been taken for a plain country gentleman. His blue coat, closely buttoned over his

chest, did not afford a glimpse of the least bit of red ribbon. His dress was as unpretending as possible; his manners easy and natural, and his countenance expressed at once good-nature and shrewdness. Not but that there was at the same time something commanding in his appearance, and in his eye sometimes a quick flash, which denoted perhaps a little pride. His face was still very handsome, and, which was odd, he looked much younger than my uncle. Dom Gêrusac, whose life had been spent in quiet scientific labours, had already the gait of an old man; whereas his friend, who had been plunged in the warfare of conflicting passions, and gone through the agitations of an eventful life, still walked with head erect, and a firm unhesitating step.

My uncle presented me to our guest, and then the two friends entered the house arm-in-arm. M. de Champaubert was turning towards the garden, but Dom Gêrusac drew him another way, saying, 'It is too hot out of doors; we had better go into the library.'

'By all means,' the other gaily replied; 'your library, my dear Thomas, is, I know, your world, your kingdom, your family. You will introduce me to all the ancient and modern authors assembled here. But first of all will you let me have something to drink? I am dying of thirst.'

My uncle went to the door of the kitchen and called Marian. 'Now for it,' I thought, and awaited

with a kind of comical terror the effect her appearance would produce upon his Excellency; but to my great relief she did not appear. It was Babelou who came in, carrying on a large tray a bottle of old wine, some sugar, a magnificent basket of fruit, and a plateful of little yellow peaches.

‘That is perfect,’ M. de Champaubert exclaimed, as he himself assisted Babelou to set down the tray on the table, which was all covered with manuscripts and books. ‘This clever little girl has guessed that I am particularly fond of these yellow peaches, with their little acid flavour. I don’t know anywhere a more refreshing fruit.’

‘I daresay not,’ my uncle said with a smile. ‘It is only on our barren mountains that this wild production of nature is suffered to grow nowadays.’

‘Do sit down here, dear old schoolfellow!’ the Marquis said, making room for Dom Gêrusac by his side. ‘We have so many things to talk about.’

I asked my uncle in a whisper if he had any directions to give me, and then, out of discretion, withdrew.

A little before dinner-time Babelou came to me in the dining-room, looking aghast.

‘Mercy on us, sir!’ she exclaimed, ‘what *are* we going to do? Marian has been working so hard since yesterday, that now she is taken ill, and has just been obliged to go to bed.’

I must confess that I felt an involuntary relief.

'Well, you must wait at dinner,' I said to the little maid; 'go and put on your best gown and a clean apron. Tell Marian to remain quietly in bed; I will let my uncle know about it.'

The two friends had gone from the library into the garden, and my uncle was proudly showing off his flowers and vegetables to M. de Champaubert, who seemed delighted with all he saw, went into good-natured raptures about the fine carnations and the tall cabbages, and as he walked along the trellise picked and ate the grapes with the relish of a schoolboy. I whispered to my uncle the news of Marian's illness. The dear good man went immediately to see his old servant, and I remained alone with M. de Champaubert, who, after one more turn in the garden, said, 'Perhaps we had better go and see if dinner is ready.'

The dining-room had a window down to the ground. I opened the outer blinds and stood aside to let his Excellency go in first. The curtains were drawn up, and a bright light shining in the room; the gildings of the old frames looked to advantage in the rays of the setting sun. As M. de Champaubert entered and walked towards the chimney, his eyes caught sight of the picture over the looking-glass. He turned round to me and asked eagerly, 'Do you know where that portrait came from?'

I coloured up to the eyes, and stammered out,

‘Yes, monseigneur; my uncle bought it at D——, in an old curiosity-shop.’

‘With that looking-glass and those two little cups?’

‘I believe so, monseigneur.’

Dom Gêrusac came back at that moment. ‘You must excuse me, my dear Maximin,’ he said, ‘if the attendance is not what I should have wished. But I have lost the best half of my household. My old maid-servant has been taken suddenly ill.’

‘Never mind,’ M. de Champaubert replied; ‘we will wait on ourselves, as I have done often enough in the days of the emigration.’

Fortunately Marian had been able to attend to the cooking up to the last moment, and to give directions to her aide-de-camp Babelou. The table was in consequence perfectly laid, and the dinner excellent. I had routed out from the corner of the cellar some bottles of wine really fit to be set before a king. M. de Champaubert ate sparingly and quick, talking all the time, whereas my uncle went through his dinner with his usual calm manner and steady appetite, only heightened by the pleasure of having opposite to him so welcome a guest.

For my part, I could not swallow a mouthful. Nothing could exceed my internal agitation. The Marquis’s questions evidently showed that he recognised the lovely face which I had been gazing on with such rapture for the last six weeks. He knew who

this woman was whose name I had despaired of ever discovering. He could tell me—there was no doubt of it—the very thing I most ardently desired to know. But how should I ever venture to put to him a question on the subject? How manage to approach it? These thoughts were running in my mind, when all at once, in the midst of a conversation in which political discussions were mixed up with school reminiscences, my uncle said to his friend, ‘Public affairs seem to have engrossed your whole life. You have never, I suppose, thought of marrying?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ was the reply. And the Marquis, looking up at the picture over the chimney, added, ‘I was to have married the beautiful girl whose portrait that is.’

‘You don’t say so!’ my uncle exclaimed; ‘that anonymous portrait? It is a singular coincidence.’

M. de Champaubert said, ‘I certainly did not expect to have seen here that likeness of the fair object of my first love.’

‘You must tell us all about it,’ Dom G rusac said. ‘As we are by way of recalling all our old recollections, I am glad you have happened to find here this souvenir of the past.’

The Marquis smiled a little bitterly, and answered, ‘I can *now* speak of it without emotion; and since you wish it, I will give you the history of that time of my life. • Not so much for your edification, my dear

old friend, as for the sake of your nephew, who sits there gazing so intently on my betrothed that it would almost seem as if her fatally beautiful eyes had instilled into his soul some of their poison.'

These words, whether said in jest or in earnest, put me quite out of countenance. I felt as if the speaker had read my inmost thoughts, and I could only reply to this kind of apostrophe by a nervous attempt at a cough.

My uncle, after emptying his glass at one gulp, laid both his hands on the tablecloth, which was with him a token of the deepest attention, and prepared to listen.

'Let us have coffee brought in here, and send Babelou away,' M. de Champaubert said; 'I must tell my story with that *picture before my eyes*.'

### CHAPTER III.

#### MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS AND MONSIEUR LE BARON.

THE day was waning. I lighted the candles on both sides of the mirror. The light thrown on the picture brought out its faded tints, and lent a vague relief to the enchanting face, which seemed to smile through the glass that covered it like one of Greuze's lovely heads behind the half-opened curtain of a window. The Marquis fixed his eyes steadily upon it for

a moment, and then, as if he guessed my secret but intense curiosity, he addressed himself to me, and said : 'That is the portrait of Mademoiselle de Malpeire, the only daughter of the Baron de Malpeire.'

'Of the last lord !' I exclaimed ; 'and she lived in the old castle at the top of the mountain ?'

'Yes, my young friend,' M. de Champaubert replied ; 'and it was there that the events took place which I am about to relate.' After a pause, he turned to Dom Gêrusac and said : 'Do you remember, my dear Thomas, my writing to you a letter, in which I mentioned that I was leaving Paris and going to take a journey to the south of France ?'

'Yes, to be sure, I recollect it,' my uncle answered. 'It was the last I ever received from you, and, without meaning any reproach, it was written, if I mistake not, before the Revolution, in the month of August 1789.'

'What a wonderful memory you have for dates !' M. de Champaubert exclaimed. 'You are quite right, for I arrived in this country some time after the famous night of the 4th of August. But I must begin by explaining to you the origin of the friendship which existed between the Champauberts, an ancient family in Normandy, and the Malpeires of Provence. More than a hundred years ago, at the time of the war with Piedmont, the division of our army commanded by the Maréchal de Tessé occupied the



frontier. My great-great-grandfather, Guillaume de Champaubert, served in the Régiment d'Auvergne, as did also a young nobleman of this country, the Baron de Malpeire. They soon became sworn friends, as well as comrades in arms. Both were in the prime of life, and married to young wives, who had accompanied them to the seat of war; that is to say, they had taken up their residence at the Castle of Malpeire, which was considered an impregnable fortress. Several engagements had taken place between the French and the Piedmontese, who were ravaging the low country. In one of these engagements the Marquis de Champaubert was wounded. His wife hastened to the field of battle, about two leagues from here, and succeeded in getting him transported to the Castle of Malpeire, where he died on the following day. A short time afterwards, the Baron de Malpeire was killed under the walls of C——. After this double calamity, the two ladies remained at Malpeire, shut up by the snow which lies on these mountains, as you know, for six months out of the year. On the same day they both gave birth to sons, who were christened at the same time in the church of the village. In commemoration of this event, two elm-trees were planted and named after the new-born children. In my time the shade of these trees covered the whole square. Are they still in existence?

‘Yes, they are,’ monseigneur,’ I eagerly cried; ‘and they go by the name of Monsieur le Marquis and Monsieur le Baron—but no one here knows why.’

‘The two widows spent the year of their mourning together. Subsequently they were obliged to part; but the similarity of their fate had given rise to a friendship, which lasted as long as they lived. They took care to instil the same feelings in the hearts of their sons, who in their turn transmitted them to their children. Although living at the opposite extremities of the kingdom, the two families did not fail to communicate to one another any interesting domestic event; and on all respective birthdays letters of congratulation were duly sent. A long-standing desire for a matrimonial alliance between the two families had not ceased to exist, but Providence seemed to have decreed that their wishes should meet with constant disappointment. During three generations not a single girl was born in the house of Champaubert, and the daughters of the Lords of Malpeire all died in infancy. I had often in my childhood heard this spoken of at home, and I also knew that the Baron de Malpeire happened now to have a daughter about my own age. It was not, therefore, much of a surprise to me when, two years after I had left La Chaise Dieu, my father told me one day that he had arranged my marriage with Mdlle. de Malpeire. “My dear Maximin,” those were his words, “I think this mar-

riage combines all that we can desire. I knew the Baron when he came to Paris, about twenty-five years ago, to be married to Mdle. d'Herbelay, one of the most charming persons in the world. He is a nobleman of the old school, a little narrow-minded and ignorant, but full of generous and noble feelings. The young lady's dowry is amply sufficient, and as to the name of Malpeire, it speaks for itself—it is one of the oldest in Provence. I have not made any particular inquiries with regard to the beauty of your future bride, you will soon be able to judge of it yourself; I only know that she is in her twentieth year." My father said this with a smile, which made me conclude that an agreeable surprise was in store for me, and that Mdle. de Malpeire was very handsome. You see by that picture that I was not mistaken.'

'Yes, she must have been a pretty girl,' my uncle said, raising his eyebrows, with the kind of look a peasant might have put on if called upon to admire an ancient coin or a manuscript in a dead language.

'I arrived here, as I said before, towards the end of August,' M. de Champaubert continued. 'I had been travelling eight days on the dusty road in an uncomfortable post-chaise, and I well remember the delight I felt at the sight of these mountains and green valleys, and the pleasure it was to hear the sound of running water in every direction. The present road did not then exist; there was only a path

for horses and mules. I was riding, and a mule-driver followed with my luggage. This man had travelled a little, and, though a native of the country, he spoke French, and told me the names of the various harlets which we saw at a distance, and had a story to relate about each of them. When we came to the entrance of the gorge which is commonly called the Pass of Malpeire, he pointed out to me a flat stone which juts out of the rock and forms a kind of seat a little below the road. Have you ever noticed it?

‘To be sure I have,’ my uncle answered. ‘It is there my old servant Marian rests when we go to Mass.’

‘I was expecting to hear some tale about robbers in that cut-throat-looking place, but my guide only said, “This is the place, sir, where the daughter of the Baron de Malpeire came to life again.” “What daughter?” I asked. “O, the one who is now full of health and spirits. When she was just seven years old she sickened and died, as all her brothers and sisters had done, who have now been a long time in heaven. She was so really and truly dead that they put her into a coffin, with a white wreath on her head and a crucifix between her hands, and set out from the castle to lay her in the vault of the old chapel at the bottom of the hill, which is the burial-place of the lords of the manor. When the young girls who were carrying the body arrived at this spot they were tired,

and placed the coffin on that stone seat whilst they rested a little. M. le Curé had left off chanting the *Libera nos Domine*. Nobody spoke, and not a sound was to be heard except the murmur of the torrent flowing through the ravine. All at once a little voice came out of the coffin. The child sat up, looked about her as if for the water, and said, 'I am so thirsty.' All who were there felt frightened when they saw her lift up her shroud; but M. le Curé took her up in his arms and carried her back to her mother alive and well." This story, I can hardly tell why, made me shudder. I had been dwelling incessantly during my journey on thoughts of love and marriage. I trembled to think how near I had been losing my bride. The wild scenery and the gloomy grandeur of the surrounding country worked on my imagination; I was enraptured with the aromatic perfume of the Alpine plants, the solitary beauty of the mountains, the confused but harmonious sounds which rose from the deep woods, the delicious air I was breathing. It was in this frame of mind that I arrived at Malpeire. The castle was at that time an old fortress, to which some modern additions had been from time to time joined on. It was surrounded by formidable walls and flanked by crested towers; but a new frontage concealed the lower part of the keep, which stood at the edge of a perpendicular rock above the precipice. The windows were provided with green blinds; and

the platform on which they looked had been transformed into a little flower-garden, open to every wind. But these embellishments had altered in nothing the character of the old baronial residence. The principal entrance was to the north, and on that side the castle completely preserved the warlike and severe aspect of the buildings of the middle ages. A wide moat surrounded the ramparts, and the entrance-gate stood between two little towers, still furnished with falconets. The drawbridge existed in the same state as at the time of the wars of Provence, but for many years it had not been raised, and its solid planks formed a kind of passage, without chains or hand-rail. When I arrived the sun was just setting. I dismounted at the drawbridge, and throwing the bridle of my horse to the guide, I walked on, looking about for some one to speak to. After going through a vaulted passage, I came into a large court surrounded by ancient buildings, the mullioned windows of which were all closely shut up. No one appeared, and so profound was the silence that the castle might have been supposed to be uninhabited. After once walking round the court, I ventured to push open a door which stood ajar, and I saw before me the first steps of a winding staircase and a niche in the wall with an image of the Blessed Virgin surrounded with bouquets. I went up, feeling my way as I ascended, and on reaching the first landing-place found myself at the

entrance of a spacious and lofty room, the furniture of which seemed to me to date from the time of the League. A solitary lamp was burning at the corner of a table. By its light I could just discern the tapestried walls, the high-backed chairs, the large branch candlesticks of copper, and the chimney, with its heavy mantelpiece projecting over the hearth like a stone canopy. I concluded that this room, or rather hall, must be the ante-chamber of another apartment, where I could hear the sharp shrill yapping of a little dog who was barking furiously, no doubt at the sound of a strange footstep. I knocked to give notice of my presence, and a stout servant-girl, dressed in green baize, made her appearance ; but without allowing me time to give an account of myself, she ran towards the door at the other end, calling out, "Mdlle. Boinet, Mdlle. Boinet." A middle-aged woman, with the air and manner of a confidential attendant in a great family, then came forward and made me a low curtsy. When I mentioned my name she assumed a smiling, discreet expression of countenance, which seemed intended to convey that she knew what I was come about, and with a true Parisian accent, which showed her to have been born within hearing of the bells of Notre Dame, she said, "I beg, sir, to offer to you my most humble respects. I will hasten to inform Madame la Baronne of your arrival." A moment afterwards the folding-doors opened, and Madame la

Baronne herself, coming forward, said to me, "M. de Champaubert, I beg you a thousand pardons. I am more shocked than I can express that you did not find any one below to show you up. The fact is, we did not expect you till to-morrow." I apologised for having arrived thus unexpectedly, and Madame de Malpeire having invited me in, I offered my hand to lead her back to her room. When I crossed the threshold of the door I was so taken by surprise that I could not help exclaiming, "This is something marvellous, Madame la Baronne! You have managed to carry off the *salon* of one of the most charming hotels of the Faubourg St. Germain, or of Versailles, and to place it at the top of this mountain!" "Well," she answered, laughing, "I have contrived to arrange a corner of this old castle so as to make it possible to live in it. When the curtains are drawn and the candles lighted, I can almost fancy myself at Paris. But, alas, when I look out, the illusion is at an end. Instead of the gardens of the Luxembourg, I see nothing from my window but the roofs of the village, and on every side rocks, woods, and mountains. Indeed, I have often been tempted to say what my late mother-in-law, she was a Forbin Janson, wrote from here to her uncle the Cardinal, just after she was married—'Here I am, lodged in the skies, with the eagles at my back, and near enough to the moon to touch it with my hand.'" She laughed again, and after inviting me to



sit down, took up on her knees the little spaniel, who still kept growling at me *sotto voce*, and sank back into her chair in a gracefully indolent attitude. The Baronne de Malpeire was a thin small woman, who looked at first sight much younger than she was. Her dress was somewhat old-fashioned, but it was in keeping with the style of her delicate features and her coquettish manners. What with rouge and powder, her complexion exhibited the peculiar brilliancy of a pretty family portrait. She managed to wear, with all the easy grace of a *grande dame*, that most troublesome invention of the last century, an enormous flounced petticoat, spreading over two stiff projecting pockets, and walked with great dignity in the most prodigiously high-heeled shoes. I was too much absorbed, too much agitated, to attend much to anything but the one predominating thought in my mind. Every sound made me start, and I kept watching the door in hopes every moment of seeing Mdlle. de Malpeire appear, though I could not summon courage to inquire after her or even to pronounce her name. "The Baron is out shooting, as usual," Madame de Malpeire said; "but it will not be long now before he comes home. In the mean time, I will order some refreshments to be brought up for you here. What will you have? a little wine, with a slice of dry toast? or a glass of *eau sucrée*, perhaps." I declined, but she insisted. "Well, but a cup of coffee, then, with me?"

Nobody ever refuses a cup of coffee. Mdlle. Boinet, bring the little table here, and ring that we may send for hot water." The lady-in-waiting pushed a little round stand in front of her mistress, and placed upon it, between two lighted candles, a small chest of sandal wood. Madame de Malpeire opened this case and took out of its blue-velvet compartments, a coffee-pot, a sugar-basin, and those two little cups you see on the chimney-piece."

'O, I felt sure of it!' I cried, clasping my hands on my forehead.

The Marquis looked at me with a faint smile, and continued: 'When the coffee was ready, Madame de Malpeire poured it out into the two cups, gave me one, and as she took the other herself, she said, "Mdlle. Boinet, will you let my daughter know that I wish to see her? Not one word more, if you please." I felt that I changed colour, but I said nothing. My agitation seemed to amuse Madame de Malpeire. "Come now," she whispered, with a smile, "it would be all very well if you were the young lady." After a pause, she added more seriously, "That little girl of mine does not, you know, expect to see you here, so you must not be surprised if she does not welcome you at the first moment in the way you deserve." "I deserve nothing yet," I cried. "I can only hope. And I do hope, madame, that I shall not prove unworthy in your daughter's eyes of the happiness that

has been promised to me." Almost at the moment I was saying this, Mdlle. de Malpeire came in by the door opposite to the one which opened on the large room. I had heard the sound of her light footstep; but when she saw me, she stopped short and seemed inclined to make her escape. Her mother, to relieve her embarrassment, rose, took her by the hand, and leading her forward, said in a playful manner, "This is my daughter, sir, a very shy young lady, but when she has seen more of the world I have no doubt she will soon learn to make herself agreeable." I muttered a few words of compliment, to which Mdlle. de Malpeire made no reply beyond a silent curtsy, and then, with a cold, distant, almost haughty, expression of countenance, she sat down by her mother. The shyness which Madame de Malpeire had spoken of evidently amounted either to an excessive reserve or a total absence of any desire to please. But so great was the charm about this lovely girl, that, in spite of her ungraciousness, it was impossible not to be irresistibly captivated. That portrait gives only a faint idea of her beauty. Who could ever have painted the exquisite delicacy of her complexion, and her eyes, which seemed at one moment to flash fire and an instant afterwards to express the most bewitching sweetness? Yes, she was wonderfully beautiful. She possessed that extraordinary power of fascination which robbed Adam of Paradise, and

would have beguiled Satan himself had he been made of mortal clay. Dazzled by this fair vision, I lost all self-possession, and really during the whole of that evening I must have appeared a perfect fool. For the first time in my life, I had fallen desperately in love.'

## CHAPTER IV.

### A SUITOR UNDER THE OLD REGIME.

'MADAME DE MALPEIRE was quietly sipping her coffee, and fortunately took upon herself the whole burden of conversation. "My dear love," she said, glancing over her daughter's dress, "I don't like you in that cotton gown and those clumsy flat shoes; and why is your hair tied up quite at the back of your head, and without any powder? It is very evident that Mdlle. Boinet has had nothing to do with your toilet. You really look a perfect fright!" "Do I, mamma?" Mdlle. de Malpeire said, as she raised her eyes to the glass in which I had been contemplating for the last quarter of an hour that beautiful fair hair, fastened by a simple tortoise-shell comb, her blooming colour, and the fineness of her slender waist, enclosed in a corsage of blue-and-white print. Her eyes met mine in the glass. She instantly turned her head away, with a look not so much of confusion as of annoyance.

“You must excuse my daughter's *deshabille*” Madame de Malpeire added, addressing herself to me. “She did not know we should have company this evening, or she would have dressed for supper. I wish she would take more pains about her dress, but I cannot get her to attend to it. She pretends, foolish child, that she cannot walk in high-heeled shoes.” “Mademoiselle may perhaps be right on that point,” I ventured to say. “It must be very difficult, Madame la Baronne, to keep one's balance with shoes like yours.” “O, not at all,” she quickly replied; “I assure you it is all habit. I should not think of taking a step beyond my room with my morocco slippers, and with these little shoes I can walk very well.” She put out at the same time her tiny foot, encased in a shoe of that absurd shape which only allowed the great toe to touch the ground, and then striking together the high wooden heels, covered with white leather, she added with a sigh, “I have danced in shoes of this kind in a ballet at the Hôtel de Richelieu, in which I appeared as a shepherdess. But that was a long time ago.” Then passing by a sudden transition to graver thoughts, she exclaimed, “It is a terrible thing to live as we do here, excluded from society, and with hardly any intercourse with the world. I have never been able to reconcile myself to this kind of banishment. When I came to this spot after my marriage, I little thought I should spend my life here. I endured my solitude and

*ennui* with patience, because I was young, and with so many years of life before me; and felt as if there would be time enough later for amusement, and so I allowed my youth to slip by. M. le Baron is kindness and good nature itself; though we have not the same tastes, and though the life he leads here suits him exactly, he would always have been willing to take me to Paris. Every spring and every autumn the journey was talked of; but I have had a great many children, and whenever the time to set out approached, I was not able to travel. If I had not arranged this apartment in the way you see, and had my poor Boinet with me, I do not know what I should have done, I must have died of *ennui*." "But Heaven in its mercy, Madame la Baronne, spared you one of your children," I timidly replied; "and whilst you devoted yourself to your daughter's education, the isolation you complain of must have been less sensibly felt." "O, of course," she answered.

'And bending down to fasten a bow of ribbon which had been lying on the table in her daughter's hair, she added, "This little puss has never left me. I taught her myself to read. I also tried to give her music lessons, but the attempt was not very successful. Her education has been left a little to chance. I brought from Paris with some other furniture a little bookcase filled with works chosen by my late uncle, the Baillé d'Herbelay, who was a philosopher, and a

friend of all the learned men of his time. My daughter has taken possession of those books, ancient and modern, and though they are not particularly amusing, her greatest pleasure is to read them. To-day she has spent the whole morning poring over a thick, huge volume."

"I ventured to address myself to M<sup>lle</sup>. de Malpeire, and to ask her what was the work which had interested her so much. "*The Philosophical History of the East and of the West Indies*, by the Abbé Raynal," she answered. "It is a very nice book, only I am sorry to find in it some passages favourable to the Jesuits." "What, are you against the Jesuits?" I asked; "are you then a Jansenist, mademoiselle?" "No, sir," she quickly replied; "I am nothing at all." "I am delighted that my daughter is fond of reading," Madame de Malpeire said, playing with her snuff-box as she spoke. "For my part, I never could apply my mind to it, and as to serious books, I cannot endure them." Astonished at this undisguised frivolity, I answered, "If I might venture a suggestion, I would advise you, Madame la Baronne, to go out sometimes, and walk on those beautiful adjacent mountains, clothed with almost more flowers than grass. The finest gardens do not present, I assure you, a more brilliant and smiling picture." "Yes, I daresay it is very pretty," she replied, in an indifferent manner; "but the roads which lead to these charming spots are not so smooth

as the alleys of the Park of Versailles. We should have no end of precipices to cross." "In that case," I said, "we must look nearer home. If I were you, Madame la Baronne, I would try and interest myself about the people among whom I lived, and the details of rural life. I would often go into the village, and visit the tenants." "O, dreadful," she exclaimed, laughing; "you do not know what you advise! Every Sunday at church I have a distant view of these good people, and I can assure you that it is quite enough to take away any wish to see them nearer."

"I saw a look of indignation in Mdlle. de Malpeire's eyes, and in an almost imperceptible manner she moved a little farther from her mother's side. What I had said seemed, on the contrary, to meet with her tacit approval. She turned towards me with a less stern expression of countenance. "There are, then, some very beautiful flowers, sir, on our wild mountains?" she said. "As beautiful," I replied, "as any of our gardens can boast. There are slopes entirely covered with the blue heartsease and the purple-headed aconite, and all kinds of other plants, one more lovely than the other. But I suppose you have often walked, mademoiselle, in that part of your father's property?" "No, sir, never," she coldly replied. "My mother does not go beyond the walls of the castle, except to church, and she would not allow me to walk anywhere without her." "Here is my husband," cried



Madame de Malpeire, turning towards the half-open window ; "he is coming into the court-yard."

'This announcement was speedily corroborated by a confused noise of footsteps, and the loud barking of several dogs. Almost immediately afterwards, the sound of a heavy tread was heard in the adjoining room, and then the Baron made his appearance, with his game-bag slung over his shoulder, and a fowling-piece in his hand. Had I met him anywhere else, I should have taken him for a poacher. He threw his cap on the sofa, wiped his sunburnt face, and after cordially embracing me, inquired after my father. Then turning to the Baronne and Mdlle. de Malpeire, he said, "How are you, wife?—how do you do, my little girl? Guess what game I bring you." "Four-legged or two-legged creatures?" asked Mdlle. de Malpeire, slipping her hand into the bag. "Both," cried the Baron, in a tone of triumph, "I have three white partridges, two red ones, and a leveret, which has kept me on the run the whole morning. I should have ended by losing it, if it had not been for that tall fellow who won the pewter plate at the wrestling-match last year." "Pinatel?" Mdlle. de Malpeire said. "Exactly so," the Baron answered, displaying his spoils; "he just happened to be there with his dog—a dog I would willingly give ten crowns for, though he does look like a badger. I had shot that hare in the back, and it went tumbling down into a precipice under the

rock of Pierre Fourcha. My dogs would not fetch it ; even Leander refused. Upon this, Pinatel went in quest of it with his cur, and brought me back the creature, and here it is." As he was emptying his bag, the Baron exclaimed, "Look here, what on earth is this little queer concern?" "Let us see," both the ladies said. It was a wooden figure, in the style of the Nuremburg dolls, roughly carved with a knife.

"What is that bit of wood intended to represent?" Madame de Malpeire asked, without touching it. "A sportsman with a gun in his hand, I suppose," the Baron answered. "No, papa ; it is a shepherd keeping his flock, and leaning on his staff," Mdlle. de Malpeire said, as she took hold of the little figure. "Do put your gloves on before you touch that thing," the Baronne exclaimed ; "how do you know through whose hands that ugly figure has passed? I daresay some peasant-boy made it in some dirty shed, sitting on the straw amongst his sheep." "Yes, very likely," replied her daughter, and she put the little figure in her pocket. "I think it is the image of some saint," the Baron opined ; "my gamekeeper slipped it, I have no doubt, into my bag to bring me luck."

He then took off his belt, threw his powder-flask on his wife's little table, and sank into the soft depths of an easy-chair, with his elbows resting on the pearl-coloured damask cushions. Madame de Malpeire sat opposite to him, playing with her fan, and now and

then taking a pinch of Spanish snuff out of a box of burnished gold. You may easily imagine what a strange contrast the husband and wife presented. He with his thick blue-cloth waistcoat, his leather gaiters reaching above his knees, his sunburnt face, large heavy hands, and colossal figure; she with her bows, her lace, her small slight figure, dainty manners, and aristocratic refinements. I looked on in astonishment.

‘The Baron asked me what was the news at Court, according to the style still in use at that time, and the conversation naturally turned on recent events. The old nobleman could not at all realise the importance and significance of what he called an audacious sedition, and spoke of it in terms of indignant contempt. “Sir,” he said to me emphatically, “we have nothing to apprehend. The King is master, and he will show himself to be so as soon as he chooses it. With one look, one word, he will crush the factious multitude.” “Who knows?” Mdlle. de Malpeire ejaculated, with a singular expression of countenance. I said to myself, “The study of the *Philosophical History of the East and West Indies* has, I see, borne its fruits.” But I considered this leaning towards the new opinions as the youthful exuberance of a generous spirit, and I was not at all anxious as to the results it might have.

‘Supper was announced, and we went into the next room. By Madame de Malpeire’s desire, I led her

daughter in, and sat down by her side. But she did not vouchsafe to look again towards me, and when I spoke to her she answered shortly, and with a marked coldness of manner. Still I could evidently see that she was by no means out of spirits. On the contrary, there was a half-smiling, half-dreamy expression in her face which perfectly enchanted me.

‘After supper we retired to the saloon, which was lighted up and arranged as if a numerous society had been expected. The arm-chairs were placed in a semi-circle opposite to the chimney, and a screen embroidered in gold-and-purple silk, with the arms of the Malpeires in the centre, stood before the hearth. The harpsichord was open, and the card table set out. Madame de Malpeire sat down at the instrument, and played an easy little sonata with her eyes looking up at the ceiling, and her head moving to and fro in time with her performance. Meanwhile, the Baron fell asleep, and Mdlle. de Malpeire gradually approached to the window, and at last ensconced herself in the recess, where she stood, half-concealed by the curtain. I could just see her profile. She was leaning her forehead on her hands, and gazing through the half-closed shutters on the outer darkness, in the midst of which a few lights in the direction of the village showed that some of the cottagers had not yet retired to rest.

“Will you play cards with me?” Madame de Mal-

peire said, as she rose from the instrument. "What do you say to a hundred at picquet? It was the Baillé d'Herbelay's favourite game, and his luck at it was wonderful. I was his scholar, but it is so long since I have played, that I am afraid I have forgotten his lessons." The card-table was near the window, and when I was seated at it, I found that there was only the curtain between me and Mdlle. de Malpeire. She immediately moved away, and sat down by her mother. "Do you, then, never play, Madame la Baronne?" I said, shuffling the cards. "No, not at picquet," she answered. "The Baron can never keep his eyes open after supper, and as to my daughter, I could never teach her the difference between a king of hearts and a knave of diamonds. Having nobody to play with me, I sometimes amuse myself with a solitary game at patience. It is a sort of method of telling fortunes with the cards." "Will you tell me mine?" I said. "O, by all means," she answered, laughing, and looking at her daughter. "We will consult the cards to see how soon a certain handsome dark young man will marry a fair young lady." Mdlle. de Malpeire blushed at this direct allusion, and a slight frown contracted her pencilled eyebrows. A moment afterwards she asked her mother's leave to withdraw, and curtsying to me, left the room without speaking. "Ah, madame," I exclaimed, "I am sadly afraid the cards do not return a favourable answer." "In that

case," she quickly replied, "they do not speak the truth." And holding out the pack to me, she added, "Cut, if you please, my dear son-in-law." We played six games at picquet. Madame de Malpeire was in ecstasies; it seemed, she said, like being in Paris again.

'When the clock struck twelve the Baron woke up, and said, looking at the clock, "You ought, I am sure, to be tired. We have kept you up much too late. It is all Madame de Malpeire's fault. We have got into this bad habit of sitting up."

'According to the old-fashioned ideas of hospitality, he lighted me to my room, and before taking leave of me for the night, he pressed my hand affectionately, and said with some emotion, "Your coming here has made me very happy. Good-night, my dear Count. To-morrow we shall talk of the future."

'In spite of the fatigues of the day, I did not rest much that night. Mdlle. de Malpeire's image kept pursuing me, and seemed to hover behind the curtains of my canopied bed. If I fell asleep I saw her, and when I awoke, my thoughts carried on the dream. This feverish excitement subsided towards morning. The lovely phantom which had haunted me vanished with the first rays of dawning light, and the delightful hopes and anticipations which had filled my mind during the night gave way to an unaccountable feeling of depression. I was in this state when, at an early

hour, the Baron walked into my room. Though the clock had not yet struck seven, I was already up and dressed. He took a chair, and sitting down by me, began at once without any preface, "My dear Count, the reception we have given you must have plainly shown what our feelings are with regard to your views in coming here. You have quite won my wife's heart; she is delighted with your appearance, your manners, your conversation. For my part, I felt to love you at once because of your great likeness to your father, the worthiest man I know. Now it is for you to say if there is anything about my daughter's looks which does not take your fancy, or if you find her pretty and attractive enough for you." "O, Monsieur le Baron," I exclaimed, "she is the loveliest, the most charming person I ever beheld! If I can obtain her hand, I shall consider myself the most fortunate man in the world." "In that case," the Baron answered, with a pleased smile, "we have nothing to do but to draw up the settlements and fix the day for the wedding." "You do not anticipate, then, any obstacle?" I asked, in an agitated voice. "No, what obstacle could there be?" he replied; "you have my consent, and Madame de Malpeire's—what would you desire more?" I clasped the hand he held out to me in token of his promise, and then asked him as a favour to delay my happiness for a little while. "I beseech you," I said, "not to tell Mdlle. de Malpeire that you

have accepted my proposals for her. Allow me a few days, during which I shall endeavour to win her own consent."

"He laughed and answered, "O, by all means, my dear Count; I can refuse no request of yours. Pay your court to my daughter, fair Amadis. Her heart must be made of steel if it does not soon surrender at discretion. Now," he added, "come to breakfast, and then I will take you over the castle. We have plenty of time to spare; my wife only gets up for dinner at twelve o'clock."

"The Castle of Malpeire is now, I suppose, a heap of ruins; but at that time not one stone of its ramparts was missing, and it contained treasures of antiquarian value. The armoury and the archives especially were full of rare and highly interesting curiosities. In the tower of the keep were some banners which had been brought back from the Holy Land by one of the Lords of Malpeire at the time of the Crusades. They consisted only of strips of faded yellow silk fastened to a plain staff of black wood. As the Baron stood gazing on these trophies, he said, "They may abolish all titles of nobility, they may deprive us of all our rights, but they can never turn those old Saracen banners into mere worthless rags. And it is the same with us. As long as our race exists, it will be noble by right, and noble in fact, in spite of revolutions." I quote the old nobleman's words, because



## *The Portrait in my*

they give you an idea of his principles, and they account for the stern inflexibility he testified later on.

‘A little before dinner-time, Madame de Malpeire sent Mdlle. Boinet to request me to come to her room. To my great disappointment, I found her alone.

“Good-morning, my dear Count,” she said. “The Baron has given me a hint of what passed between you this morning. I was longing to tell you how charmed I am with the delicacy of your sentiments. They are worthy of a high-minded gentleman. I approve very much of your wish to begin, in the first place, by winning my daughter’s affections.” “I shall try my utmost to do so,” I answered with a sigh. “You will not be at a loss for opportunities of ingratiating yourself,” replied Madame de Malpeire. “I would, for instance, advise you to join my daughter in the parterre, where she is gone to take a walk. I have secured for you this little *tête-à-tête* with her.”

## CHAPTER V.

### THE COURTSHIP.

‘MADEMOISELLE DE MALPEIRE was walking slowly under the shade of what used to be called a pleached alley, a sort of long bower on one side of the parterre, ending with an arbour, if at least a sort of trellis painted light green, up which a few creepers were

twisting their sickly shoots, could be dignified by that name. I hurried into a little walk which ran parallel to the alley, but Mdlle. de Malpeire was so engrossed by her own thoughts that she did not notice my approach. I saw her go into the summer-house and seat herself on the bench where she had left her work-basket. For a few minutes she remained in a pensive attitude, her head leaning on her hand, her elbow resting on a little garden table. I did not venture to interrupt her meditation, but when she took up her embroidery and began diligently to ply her needle, I joined her in the arbour. The instant she saw me Mdlle. de Malpeire rose as if she meant to go away. I hastened to say, "Madame la Paronne gave me leave to come and look for you, mademoiselle. Will you allow me to offer you my hand to escort you back to the drawing-room?"

'She bowed in a way that did not imply either consent or refusal, and continued to keep her eyes bent down on her work. I felt too much agitated to begin the conversation, and remained silent, which must have seemed to her extraordinary. In order to relieve my embarrassment, I took up and held in my hand one end of the long strip of blue silk which she was ornamenting with silver and gold lace. The taste and execution of this elaborate piece of embroidery was very questionable, but I kept gazing upon it as if it had been a *chef d'œuvre* worthy of the most profound

admiration. After having carefully studied its details, I replaced it in a very respectful manner on the table before Mdlie. de Malpeire,<sup>1</sup> and asked her for whom she intended this work of her hands. "For him who shall win it," she replied, spreading out the piece of silk on her knees, in order to judge of the effect of a bit of edging she had been adding to the embroidery. "Is there, then, going to be a tournament?" I said, with a smile; "because in that case, mademoiselle, I shall certainly enter the lists, and dispute against all comers the prize you propose to award to the conqueror." "No, sir," she answered, with a half-amused look, "I am sure you won't." "Why, not, mademoiselle?" I exclaimed. "I would willingly run the risk of my life to obtain—I do not say this scarf, but something far less precious—a ribbon, or even a flower which you had worn." She resented this foolish speech by turning her head away with a look of annoyance. "Do tell me," I urged, "what would be the way to win so inestimable a prize." "The way would be," she answered, "to overcome a crowd of competitors." This was said with a smile bordering on a sneer. "I shall carry it off," I exclaimed. "You will do no such thing," she said again, smiling, "you will not even try to do so." "What can prevent me?" I asked. She replied,— "Next Sunday is the *fête* of the village. All the young men will take part in the games. In the afternoon

they wrestle on the green, and the strongest and most active of the lot will receive this scarf. So you see that I was right when I said that you would not ever wish to compete for it."

"I was weak enough to feel vexed with this explanation, and I instantly replied, "And so, then, mademoiselle, the work of your hands is to figure by the side of the pewter dish your father was mentioning yesterday. Allow me to say that this is doing too great an honour in my opinion to that public-house trophy." She seemed more deeply wounded by these words than I had expected. The colour rose in her face, and she exclaimed, in a tone of indignation and even anger, "You despise, I see, the people and their amusements. Your pride disdains the industrious, simple-hearted men whose labour you live upon. But patience, patience!"

"It was hardly then the time to make my profession of faith on philosophical and political subjects, so I merely said, "I assure you that I neither despise nor disdain anybody, even the most obscure and humble. I must, however, admit that I have sympathies and repugnances which result from my education." "From your prejudices," she subjoined in a low voice. I did not choose to take exception to this phrase, which might have led to an argument, and I contented myself with answering, "I own that I am exclusively attached to the society in which I have

always lived, and I am convinced that you will share that feeling when you have once taken your place in it, amongst the most lovely, the most admired, the most respected of its members." She shook her head, and in an almost inaudible voice uttered the word "Never." "What!" I exclaimed, "have you not the least desire to become acquainted with that refined and intellectual world which your education must have given you already some idea of? Would you not like to leave for a while your solitary home, and visit that great city of Paris you have so often heard of?" "No, sir," she replied; "it would give me, on the contrary, the greatest pain to leave our poor mountains. I dread everything that could lead to my going away from here."

'I was not altogether displeased with this reply; for it was evident that if Mdlle. de Malpeire persisted in her resolution never to leave the old fortress where she had been born, I had every chance of becoming her husband, if only from the lack of any other possible suitor. I also foresaw storms in the future likely to obscure the calm and brilliant existence which I should otherwise have planned for her elsewhere; and the idea of living in retirement with so charming a companion in this remote corner of the world was by no means distasteful to me. "You may be right," I said, after a short silence. "It is perhaps true wisdom to prefer the peace and tranquillity you enjoy here to any other mode of existence. Everywhere else your

life might be disturbed by events against which no human foresight could secure you. If the Revolution does not stop, who knows what will be the fate of that brilliant, refined, fashionable society I was speaking of just now? It would be far better to live in the most profound seclusion than to witness the decay and destruction of that old French society to which the new *régime* has already dealt such terrible blows. Its ranks are already thinning; the nobility emigrates, or withdraws into the provinces. I should probably find in Paris many *salons* shut up, many aristocratic houses deserted. Under these circumstances, I could easily make up my mind to give up the world, and lead the life of a simple country gentleman."

"You, sir!" she quickly replied; "you could not do it. You would be like my mother, for ever regretting the parties, the balls, the visits, the card-playing, and all the amusements you have been accustomed to." "It would only depend upon you," I exclaimed with a burst of impassioned admiration, "to prevent my regretting anything." She drew back to the farthest end of the bench on which we were sitting, and shrugged her shoulders with a scornful defiant expression, which would have made another woman ugly, but which, by some unaccountable fascination, only served to render her more captivating. Then, without taking any farther notice of me, and as if tired of conversation, she leant on her elbows against the trellis,

and through that sort of lattice sat gazing on the landscape. Her muslin cape had fallen off her head, and though her face was turned away from me, I could see, through the locks of her fair hair, its lovely outline, her smooth white temple and swan-like neck, at the back of which were hanging the ends of a black ribbon. A rather long silence ensued. I was watching her with anxiety and admiration, not venturing to speak first, but impatiently waiting for the moment when she would turn again her head towards me. She had not changed her position, and seemed absorbed in a sort of gloomy reverie. But all at once I saw her start and blush up to the roots of her hair. I could almost perceive the beating of her heart through the folds of the muslin handkerchief which covered her breast. She leant trembling against the trellis work, as if ready to faint from the excess of her agitation. With an irresistible curiosity I sprang from the seat and stood behind her, looking over her shoulder and trying to make out the cause of that extraordinary emotion. But in vain I cast my eyes in every direction. There was no one passing under the castle walls. Everything was quiet and silent about the place, and farther off I could see nothing but women washing their linen near a fountain, where my mule-driver was watering his beasts, and beyond the village only a few peasants at work here and there, and one or two goatherds following in the wake of their wandering flocks.

‘All this lasted but a short moment. Mdlle. de Malpeire drew a deep breath, and hid her face an instant with her pocket-handkerchief. When she removed it the burning blush had passed away from her cheeks. She turned towards me with a calm, proud look, which showed she did not think I had noticed anything. And indeed I remained in complete doubt, not knowing how to account for what I had observed, and almost inclined to believe my fancy had deceived me. Twelve o'clock struck, and the dinner-bell ringing, I offered to lead Mdlle. de Malpeire back to the house, but she declined on the plea that she wished to gather some flowers on her way through the garden. We met at the hall-door. She then made me a curtsy, just touched the sleeve of my coat with the tip of her fingers, and we entered the house together.

‘At dinner the conversation naturally reverted to public affairs, and the events which had taken place during the last few months. “The effect of these disorders has been felt even in this part of the country,” the Baron said. “The peasantry, especially the younger men, are infected by a very seditious spirit, and a secret agitation reigns in the whole neighbourhood. Each fresh piece of political news serves to keep up the excitement.” “The political news!” I exclaimed; “and how does it reach these good people, I wonder?” “By a number of indefatigable agents,” the Baron replied. “For instance, through those itinerary artisans who



wander about the country carrying on their back the whole of their stock-in-trade, and those lusty vagabonds, too, who make it their business to haunt the village fairs and festivals for the purpose of competing for prizes at the running and wrestling matches. The news these persons circulate is transmitted from one neighbourhood to another with considerable rapidity. They are the most active propagators of sedition, and have already done a great deal of harm. Lately they spread the report that the Assembly had decreed the destruction of all the habitations of the nobility, from the fortified castles defended by ramparts down to the small manor-houses with their dovecots and rabbit-warrens. Instantly the peasants in the plains were stirred up like a nest of ants, and marched to the assault of the Château de Maussane, a handsome building in the modern style, with a suite of apartments on the ground floor as easy of access as a ball-room. The next day a detachment of the Regiment of Bourgogne quartered at — arrived to quell the disturbance, but all was over by that time. The peasants had dispersed, after burning and laying everything to waste. They are difficult times, but I have no fear as to the issue," the Baron replied, with a confidence that could not be shaken. "It is not the first time that factions have desolated France, and our fathers were familiar with civil wars. We shall do as they did; we shall fight for our religion, our King,

and our rights ! These old walls have been more than once besieged by the Huguenots in the days of the League, but never scaled."

• ' After dinner the Baron said he was going to take a little turn with his gun in the warren. This meant a walk of more than three leagues, which generally lasted until nightfall. I remained therefore alone with Madame de Malpeire, for her daughter had disappeared as soon as we had left the dining-room. I saw her go into a little boudoir, the door of which remained half open, and when she moved about I could just catch sight of her shadow on the oak floor.

" " Well, my dear sir," said Madame de Malpeire, seating herself comfortably in her arm-chair, " have you been paying your court ?" " I have, madame, but I am very much out of heart," I replied. " O, monsieur," she cried, " you have no occasion to be so. I know that my daughter is not at all tender hearted. She will not appear at first to like you, but it is impossible that she should not appreciate your merits. It may be some time before you succeed in touching the heart of this obdurate fair one, but, in the mean time, I can see no objection to your marrying her."

" The unaccountable circumstance which had disturbed my mind in the morning recurred to me, and I said, in a hesitating manner, " But suppose a more fortunate man than myself has already succeeded in winning her affections ?" At these words, Madame de

Malpeire cast up her eyes and her hands. "My dear sir," she exclaimed, "there is not for ten leagues round a man to whom a girl like my daughter could have given a thought. No one visits here except a few old friends of the Baron's, who sometimes do us the honour of dining with us after a day's shooting with him. M. de la Tusette, for instance, who shares with him the lordship of the manor of Piedfourcha; M. de Verdache, one of our glass manufacturing nobles; M. de Cadarasse, too, who was formerly one of the rangers of the royal forests—all very excellent people, and of unexceptionable birth, I admit, but by no means agreeable members of society."

'Whilst Madame de Malpeire was thus allaying my apprehensions, I happened to cast my eyes on a most exquisite oval frame, in which was stuck a most wretched English print of Clarissa Harlowe escaping from her father's house, which neither as to size or beauty fitted the magnificent specimen of carving which encircled it. Madame de Malpeire's glance had followed mine, and with her usual versatility she instantly changed the subject of discourse. "Yes, I see," she said, "that you think it is doing too much honour to that stupid engraving to put it in that frame. I am quite of your opinion, but it is, however, my own doing, and you will understand my reasons when I tell you what led to it. You must know that I was so dreadfully bored here the first year of my

marriage that I became in consequence positively ill. The Baron was always looking out for something to amuse me. He happened to hear of an Italian painter, who was making the round of the neighbouring châteaux seeking for employment. He took it into his head to send for him to make my picture, and at the same time he sent to Paris for a handsome frame and a box of coloured crayons, for portraits in pastel are the only ones I like, and I would not on any account have had mine done in any other manner. The Italian did not arrive, however, for three or four months, and when at last he did come I was grown dreadfully thin, and so weak that I could hardly walk a step. However, to please the Baron I consented to have my likeness taken, but after the first sitting I was obliged to give it up. My health completely gave way, and I did not leave my bed for six weeks. The first time I came out of my room he brought me here, and making me sit down in front of that frame, he said, 'Our Italian painter did not require to see you more than once in order to set to work. Look up, dear heart, and tell me if you do not recognise your own features in that face.' I positively shrieked, for the abominable wretch had actually painted me in oils, and besides that he had the beautiful idea of dressing me up like a Roman or a Turk, or I don't know what, with a yellow drapery round my waist, and on my head a sort of turban, and no powder. I told the Baron I could not bear to see

myself in that dress, even in a picture, and that, with his permission, I would send that horrid daub into the lumber-room. It was accordingly carried up-stairs, but the frame remained where it was, and Boinet be-thought herself of sticking that print into it. I locked up the box of crayons, in the hope that some other painter might perhaps come this way, but we never see those foreign artists now, and so that affected Clarissa Harlowe still occupies my place."

"Perhaps you would allow me," I said, "to try and take your likeness; I can draw a little." "No, no. I thank you very much, but it is too late now," she answered with a sort of melancholy vivacity. "It is at twenty, my daughter's age, that a woman should have her portrait taken; it is her picture I should like to see in that frame." "If she will sit to me," I exclaimed, enchanted with the hint, "I can begin it to-morrow." "Why not to-day?" cried Madame de Malpeire; "we have only to let my daughter know;" and she invited me by a sign to follow her into the boudoir. Mdle. de Malpeire was standing reading near a little bookcase, the old Baillé d'Herbelay's, of course. When we came in she quickly threw down the volume, but without any attempt at concealing it. When her mother told her that I was going to take her portrait she evinced neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction, but carelessly twisting up her fair long curls, she answered laconically, "I am ready."

"Not so fast, mademoiselle, not so fast," cried Madame de Malpeire; "I must have you dressed as a nymph, and your hair slightly powdered, and you must wear in it sky-blue bows." "Very well, mamma," she answered, with a look of resignation. "Go into your room with Boinet," Madame de Malpeire continued, "and while she dresses your hair I will get everything ready here." I remained alone in the boudoir, and could not resist the temptation of ascertaining what book it was Mdlle. de Malpeire had been reading. I found it was Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*. A sentence in the preface of that work flashed across my mind: "The woman who will venture to read this book is as good as lost." "Thank Heaven," I thought to myself, "we have no St. Preux here." I was too young, too thoughtless, too much in love, to make any more serious reflections on this discovery. I put back the volume in its place, only regretting that chance had happened to throw it in Mdlle. de Malpeire's way.

Madame de Malpeire, like all persons who are habitually idle, was wonderfully active when for once she hit upon something to do. Under her superintendence the little room was transformed into a kind of studio, and she sent for the box of crayons, the sheets of vellum, and all the things which were to have been originally used by the Italian artist. Mdlle. de Malpeire in the dress and *coiffure* her mother had

desired, looked on with indifference at all these preparations. When they were completed she said it was too late to begin that day, that I should not have time to sketch-in her portrait. "You are right, my dear," her mother replied; "and, moreover, it is time for our gouter. Ring the bell, that Boinet may send us up cakes and fruit." The fruit Madame la Baronne spoke of was a plateful of those little yellow peaches which I ate this morning with so much relish. Mdlle. Boinet took them up one after another on the point of a fork, and after peeling and cutting them in quarters with a silver knife, she poured upon them sugar and wine. Madame de Malpeire helped me to some of this compote, and said with a sigh, "This is the only fruit which ripens here." "It is quite excellent," I answered, with perfect sincerity. "It is very kind of you to say so," she replied; "they would not be eatable but for the art Boinet possesses of improving their flavour with sugar and wine. She prepares cherries for me in the same way when it is the season for it. That woman is a perfect treasure. She has neat handy ways of doing things which make her services invaluable. I wanted her to have married some peasant in the village, whom I could have made an upper servant after she had polished him up a little. But she could never make up her mind to marry one of those clownish fellows."

"Really, mamma," exclaimed Mdlle. de Mal-

peire, with a sudden vivacity, "it would have only been too great an honour for her. Those clownish fellows, as you call them, are free independent men, whereas her position is that of a menial." "O, good Heavens!" Madame de Malpeire exclaimed, "what is the meaning of these fine phrases? Where have you learnt this nonsensical trash, my dear? Let me tell you that Mdlle. Boinet's excellent conduct and the refinement of her manners have raised her long ago above what you call a menial condition. I beg to assure you that she would have lowered herself greatly in the social scale by marrying a man inferior to her in mind and education—one of those boorish, stupid peasants whom you call free independent men."

'Mdlle. de Malpeire coloured violently at this kind of reproof, and hung down her head with a look of embarrassment and ill-concealed anger. I was surprised at her seeming so annoyed at her mother's words, but my thoughts did not go any farther. I ought to have understood by that time that the education she had secretly given herself had created an impassable gulf between us. I ought to have been more alarmed at the ideas and feelings she sometimes expressed, and foreseen their ultimate results. Yes, it would have been well for her and for me if I had that day left the Castle of Malpeire, and given up all thoughts of this perverse but too captivating girl; it



might have saved her from a terrible fate. But I remained, and her doom was sealed.'

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FEAST OF ST. LAZARE.

M. DE CHAMPAUBERT paused after he had uttered these last words, and looked up at the picture. After gazing for a little while sadly and intently at the lovely face, which seemed to listen to him with a smile, he went on :

'I took possession of my newly-arranged studio, and in three or four days finished that portrait.'

'And you signed it with your initials,' added Dom Gêrusac ; 'I have often noticed that there was an M. and a C. at the corner near the beading.'

'How carefully you must have examined that anonymous picture !' M. de Champaubert replied ; 'yet it is by no means a *chef d'œuvre*.'

'No, certainly not,' my uncle answered with his usual simplicity.

'But it was an excellent likeness,' the Marquis subjoined, 'and was, therefore, of course reckoned perfect. I will not treat you, my dear Thomas, to a description of all the feelings of my infatuated heart during three or four days which were spent in con-

templating that lovely face, and in striving to reproduce on paper the nearest possible resemblance of those beautiful features. The sittings generally lasted several hours, for the Baronne was in a state of restless impatience to see my work finished. As soon as she was up, she came to the boudoir, where I was already established, and immediately sent for her daughter. Mdle. de Malpeire then made her appearance, dressed as you see her there, with her hair arranged in that way. She walked leisurely into the room, and sitting down at a little distance from the table, drew herself up in her stiff corsage, fixed her eyes upon me with a defiant expression, crossed her beautiful arms on her chest, and remained immovable in the position I had prescribed.

‘Madame de Malpeire, when I began to draw, used to cry out with an amusing impatience, “Smile, my dear, smile then!” But in spite of the maternal injunctions, she sat on proud and silent, till by degrees the expression of her countenance underwent a change. A sort of dreamy reverie seemed to steal over her, which I would not for the world have interrupted, for then her features resumed a more natural expression, a soft light shone in the blue orbs of her matchless eyes, and sometimes she looked at me, but I felt it was unconsciously, with the enchanting smile I have reproduced in that portrait. Two or three times during these long sittings, I remained for a little

while alone with her. Then her expression instantly altered; she turned her eyes away from me with a look of haughty reserve, which seemed meant to convey that any attempt at conversation would be disagreeable to her. But I was so desperately in love, and in consequence so obstinately sanguine, that these signs of indifference, and even aversion, did not destroy the hope that my love and my devoted attentions would end by softening that proud heart, and I began to think it would be as well, as her mother had said, to marry her in the mean time.

‘The Baron did not know I was making his daughter’s portrait. Madame de Malpeire intended it to be a surprise for him, and was keeping the secret with all the discretion she was capable of. It was not difficult, for he was out shooting all day, and in the evening he did not think of inquiring what we had been doing during his absence. When my *chef d’œuvre* was finished, I placed it in the frame, and hung it up myself in the drawing-room, opposite to the arm-chair in which the Baron took his nap after supper. As soon as the sun had set that evening, Madame de Malpeire desired the shutters to be closed, and the lustre which hung from the ceiling to be lighted up, as well as the branch candlesticks over the chimney-piece. Mdlle. Boînet had stripped the garden, in order to make up an enormous cipher of flowers and foliage, which she fastened above the frame. It was formed

of two M's surrounded by a coronet. The clever creature had bethought herself that my Christian name was Maximin. "What a charming idea!" Madame de Malpeire emphatically remarked. "Do look, my dear, at that cipher." "Yes, it is my cipher," Mdlle. de Malpeire quickly said, as if to protest against her mother's interpretation of the symbolic monogram. "Those two M's mean Marie de Malpeire."

'The Baron was coming home just at that minute. His wife went to meet him, and brought him in triumph to the door of the drawing-room. "O, what a beautiful picture!" he exclaimed, when he perceived his daughter's portrait. "How like it is! how perfect!" Madame de Malpeire enjoyed his surprise for a little while, and then said, with a smile, "You do not ask the name of the painter?" "Ay, indeed I ought to do so, my love; I am sure I owe him a great many thanks," he good-naturedly replied. "Here he is," his wife said, taking me by the hand; "it is his modesty which prevents his coming forward." The good old man embraced me most affectionately, and said in a gay light manner, but with a little emotion, "Well, we make an exchange. I give you the original, and you leave me the copy." At the same time he turned towards his daughter, and held out his hand as if to ask for hers, in order to place it in mine, but she drew back, and with her eyes bent on the ground, hid herself behind her mother. "Well,

you have my promise, and that is enough," he added more seriously.

"That night at supper he said to his wife, "Have you forgotten, my dear, that to-morrow is the feast of St. Lazarus, the patron Saint of the place?" "Well, I certainly never thought of it," she answered in a careless tone. "A great many people are already arrived," the Baron subjoined. "As I came home from shooting, I saw them all flocking this way, gipsies, horse-dealers, pedlars, and all the variety of tramps that pitch their tents on the ground of the fair the day before it opens. The folk from the low country are coming up in crowds, and when the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages swarm here to-morrow, there will be an immense number of people gathered together. It used to be the custom," he added, turning to me, "for the wife or the daughter of the lord of the manor to open the ball with one of the village lads. My wife did away with this practice, but my daughter chose to revive it last year, and danced with the peasants like her grandmother and her great-grandmother had done before her, but this year things must be managed differently. We shall go to the village only for Mass at the parish church." "You don't mean, sir, that we shall not be present at the games?" exclaimed Mdle. de Malpeire. "No, my dear," her father answered, in a decided manner. "Times are not what they used to be, and you can-

not appear in a place where you might not perhaps meet with proper respect."

"You are not really going to regret that rustic ball, I hope," Madame de Malpeire said, in a tone of indulgent reproach. "Charming\* partners, upon my word, those hot-faced perspiring fellows, dressed as in the heart of winter, in coats of green frieze, and short breeches of the same material; and, moreover, with worsted stockings, in their heavy clumsy shoes!" "O, mamma, what do their clothes signify?" exclaimed Mdlle. de Malpeire, in a tone of intense though suppressed irritation. "There is nothing coarse about these men but their dress. The simplicity of their manners is perhaps preferable to the refinements of our politeness, and, in spite of the peculiarities which shock you so much, their society is very enduring, I assure you." "Well, possibly so, in the open air," the Baronne replied, with a little affected laugh.

"I remembered then the blue embroidered scarf, and turning to the Baron, I asked, "Will the conqueror, then, not receive the prize from the hands of Mdlle. de Malpeire?" "He will come here for it after the sports are over," he replied. "Madame la Baronne will receive him and his companions in the hall down-stairs. This does not commit us to anything." He then led his wife back to the drawing-room. I remained a minute behind with Mdlle. de Malpeire, and trembling with emotion, I whispered to

her, "To-morrow your mother will tell you what has been settled. My happiness depends upon your answer. I cannot be happy if I do not obtain your free consent." She drew back, and looking me straight in the face, she said in a low voice, "What! so soon!" "Forgive me, forgive me," I cried, terribly agitated. "The excess of my love justifies—" "Do you mean," she coldly said, "that you would marry me against my will?" My only answer was a gesture of despair and passion. "You would really go so far as that!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Very well. Time will show!" and she turned her back upon me.

'Early the next morning, Mdlle. Boinet came to let me know that it was time to go to church. I found Madame de Malpeire dressed as if to hear Mass at the King's chapel, in a gown of Indian satin, and three great feathers in her head-dress. Mdlle. de Malpeire was also in greater toilette than usual. She had on a *déshabillé* of striped silk, and a little straw hat on her head adorned with ribbons, the long ends of which streamed down her back. When I went up to her to pay my respects, she bowed in an indifferent absent manner, which took me by surprise. I had expected to see her less composed. Her mother made me a confidential sign, and then whispered in my ear, "I have not said anything to her yet. There is no hurry about it."

'The road which descended to the village was a

sort of staircase cut in the rock. Madame de Malpeire was carried down in a sedan-chair. The Baron took care of his daughter, and I walked with them. All the household followed; that is, about a dozen men and maid servants, with Cholset the gamekeeper and Mdle. Boinet at their head.

‘There was a crowd in front of the church. The peasants in their Sunday clothes stood in groups, conversing in a noisy manner under the shade of the twin elm-trees. Farther on in the open space, where the fair was held, on a kind of natural bowling green, the mass of people was still more considerable. I observed that most of the young men wore in their button-holes, or in their hats, a bit of ribbon of the national colours, as they were then called. When the Baron and his family appeared, all eyes were directed towards them, and there was a moment of silence. The crowd made way for us to pass, and some of the older men touched their hats, but there were few of them who showed that mark of respect. Notwithstanding the recent attacks on the privileges of the nobility, the seat of the lord of the manor still existed in the old parish church. It was a beautiful piece of oaken wood-work with a very high back, surmounted by a canopy. The panels were elaborately carved, and each compartment bore the shield of the Malpeires, and their haughty motto, the Provençal words—*Fuero un degun*, “No one except one.” As



I went up the nave I observed against one of the pillars a picture worked in tapestry. It was an *ex voto*. Imperfect as was the execution, it was easy enough to recognise the scene it was intended to represent. A funeral procession was halting at the Pass of Malpeire; a coffin stood on the ledge of a rock, and a priest, with his hands upraised, was gazing on the young girl who had just lifted up her shroud. Madame de Malpeire saw that I was looking at that simple memorial, and with a sudden burst of feeling, she said, glancing at her daughter, "They were actually going to bury her alive!" "And God restored her to you in a miraculous manner," I replied, touched by her involuntary emotion. "I suppose you had that picture made as a thanks-offering?" "I worked it myself," she answered. "It took me a year to finish it."

The Baron seated himself in his usual place, his wife on one side of him and his daughter on the other. Pointing to a vacant seat by the side of the latter, he invited me to take it. The household knelt a little lower down on a carpet which was spread over the stone floor. We thus formed a separate group between the sanctuary and the nave, which was filled with the villagers and strangers. Our arrival had occasioned a little agitation amongst the crowd. When the Baronne had walked up the aisle, smiling in a condescending manner, her feathers waving to and fro, and her high-

heeled shoes resounding on the pavement, every face had been turned towards her with a malevolent expression. As soon as we had taken our places in the manorial seat, these feelings of hostility assumed a more open character. Notwithstanding the sanctity of the place, murmurs rose amongst the congregation. At this unexpected demonstration, Madame de Malpeire, who was quietly reading in her prayer-book, looked up surprised, and said to her daughter, "What do they want, I wonder?" "That everybody should pray to God without distinction of rank," Mdlle. de Malpeire answered in an excited tone. The Baron was looking very pale, and scanned the crowd with a haughty and frowning countenance. Fortunately, the priest with his acolytes appeared at that moment, and when he went up to the altar the people at the lower end of the church knelt down in silence. About a dozen young men, however, advanced towards the chancel, genuflected as they passed before the altar, and then stood together side by side opposite the Baron's seat. He whispered to me, "They have a right to stand there. From time immemorial the Abbat, that is, the prince of the young men, and his companions occupy that place on St. Lazarus'-day."

'These youths had all green sprigs in their hats, and a sort of scarf tied across the thick waistcoat which so much offended the Baronne's taste. Most

of them were robust peasants, with sunburnt faces and athletic frames. The Abbat especially furnished magnificent type of physical strength. His stature was colossal, and his regular features reminded me of the head of an ancient gladiator. This man's dress was somewhat different from that of the other peasants. Instead of worsted stockings he wore yellow leather gaiters, and in lieu of the obnoxious frieze waistcoat, a jacket of striped linen. I noticed all this in a vague, cursory manner. My anxiety was increasing as the moment approached for the publication of the banns of marriage, and I could hardly conceal the agitation with which I awaited the accomplishment of that formality. Madame de Malpeire seemed to have no misgivings, though she had not chosen to inform her daughter of what was about to take place. She looked at me from time to time with a smile, as if to congratulate me on my happiness. At last the priest, with a paper in his hand, read in a loud voice from the altar, in the midst of a profound silence: "There is a promise of marriage between the very excellent and illustrious lord, Maximin de Monville, Count of Champaubert, and the very excellent and illustrious lady, Madeleine Marie de Malpeire." Fresh murmurs rose in the body of the church, provoked this time by the sound of those titles and high-sounding appellations. I looked anxiously at Mdlle. de Malpeire. Her countenance betrayed no agitation.

She only looked very pale, and her hands trembled a little, though she tried to repress it. "Do not agitate yourself, my love," her mother affectionately whispered: "There is no occasion to be surprised, and still less distressed." "I am perfectly calm," she answered, with a faltering voice, and turning away her head.

"I saw nothing, I remarked nothing more, and yet I am sure that something must have passed there which ought to have opened my eyes and showed me I had a rival. As soon as Mass was over the Baron made way for me and said, "Now that the announcement of your marriage has been publicly made, Monsieur le Comte, lead the way and give your hand to your betrothed."

"I did so with a beating heart. Mdlle. de Malpeire suffered me to lead her down the church. The crowd had already streamed out, and was waiting for us outside. The little band of peasants, at the head of which was the Abbat, came forward. He took off his hat and addressed the Baron in Provençal. "What does he say?" whispered Madame de Malpeire in her daughter's ear. "He invites us to be present at the games," she coldly replied. "At a distance, well and good," the Baronne rejoined. "I have ordered seats to be placed along the parapet; we can see from there everything that goes on just as well as below. But we must invite that big fellow and his friends to

come up to the castle to drink a glass of wine, and receive the scarf you have taken the trouble to embroider. It is of no use for me to speak to them in French. You had better explain the matter to them, my darling." "It is already done," she answered. "My father has just told him that you expect them this evening." "Then let us quickly get out of this mob," exclaimed the Baronne, stepping into her chair; "we shall be suffocated if we stay here." We were, in fact, inconveniently thronged, the mob pressing upon us somewhat insolently. Still, there was no absolute rudeness, no threatening expressions. "I will go on first," the Baron said; "I leave you to take care of my daughter." I took Mdlle. de Malpeire's arm under mine to lead her through the crowd, but she abruptly disengaged it, and turning towards the Abbat, as if to place herself under his protection, she said to him, "Go before us, Pinatel." The colossus obeyed. He forced his way through the mob, jostling and thrusting everybody aside, and thus clearing a passage for us. As soon as we were out of the place he turned round, and without saying a word went back to his companions.

'We walked on in silence towards the castle, Mdlle. de Malpeire some way in advance of us, the Baron by my side with a gloomy disturbed countenance. At last he said, "You have seen the disposition of these people; they all but insulted us. Who

knows how far this will go? If the King does not provide a remedy, his nobles will be exposed to a conflict with the peasantry. In the mean time I must take measures for our own security. We shall not go any more into the village." "I am quite of your opinion," cried the Baronne, putting her head out of the sedan-chair. "We shall remain at home, and our daughter shall be married in the chapel of the castle. Do you know that Boinet heard them saying behind her that in all the other parishes the seats of the lords of the manor had been pulled down. You will be obliged, perhaps, to remove yours." "Never!" exclaimed the Baron. "I gave up without hesitation all pecuniary privileges; toil rents, field rents, fees, weighings, reliefs, fines on sales, and the like, all have been abolished, but never as long as I live will I renounce my honorary rights. Of these nothing but violence shall deprive me."

'As we entered the castle I tried to speak to Mdle. de Malpeire, but with determined ingenuity she contrived to avoid it. In the afternoon, however, I succeeded in detaining her on the steps as we were going down into the garden, and I said to her with great emotion, "O, mademoiselle, cannot you forgive me my happiness? What can I do to soften your feelings towards me? How can I make myself worthy of your regard? If you did but know how I love you, perhaps your heart would not be so slow to

return my affection." And as she hurried on without answering, I added, "Do let me speak to you of my feelings. You cannot object to it now that you look upon me as your future husband." "You had better say the highest bidder for my hand," she replied, with a bitter sneer. I do not know why, but at that moment a sudden suspicion flashed across my mind. With a vague but violent feeling of jealousy I exclaimed, "You care for somebody else. Who is it you prefer to me?" "You will soon know," she boldly replied, and without another word rushed into the garden.'

## CHAPTER VII.

### MADemoiselle DE MALPEIRE'S MARRIAGE.

'I GRIEVE to say that even after my short conversation with Mdlle. de Malpeire on the steps of the parterre, I did not make up my mind to give her up. On the contrary, my love became selfish and tyrannical, and I felt resolved to assert my claim to her hand, in spite of the existence of a favoured rival. So greatly did passion blind and mislead me, that the idea of a forced marriage no longer appeared to me as repugnant and odious as it used to do. The time for delay and hesitation was gone by, and I determined to speak to the Baron that very evening. We

had only to draw up the contract on the following morning, and in three days I could be married to Mdlle. de Malpeire. It was whilst I was sitting by the Baronne near the parapet, watching the games on the village green, that I turned over in my head these plans and resolutions.

'The scene below was somewhat confused. Almost everybody had left the place where the fair was held, and the crowd pressed tumultuously round an enclosure formed with ropes and stakes run into the ground. At one end of these lists—so to call them—stood a pole, at the top of which glistened in the rays of the setting sun a gigantic pewter dish. At the opposite extremity a drum and fife formed the most discordant orchestra ever inflicted on mortal ears. Mdlle. de Malpeire was on the other side of her mother, and never took her eyes off that scene. I kept watching her with feelings of jealousy, anger, and tenderness. She tried to look composed, but the expression of her countenance and the feverish flush on her cheeks betrayed a secret agitation.

"Look, my dear Count," the Baronne said to me, "the games are going to begin."

'Two half-naked men entered the lists, and seized one another by the body. One of them was soon thrown down, and silently withdrew from the ring. The other man stood bolt upright, and awaited the next combatant, who in his turn remained master of



the field, and then was vanquished by another adversary. For more than an hour new wrestlers successively occupied the centre of the ring, and were one after another rolled in the dust, amidst the shouts of the mob, who greeted them with applause, or hissed and hooted at them, according to the more or less strength and activity they evinced.

‘After two or three encounters had taken place, the Baronne turned to me, and said with a slight yawn, “It must be owned, this is a little monotonous; especially as it is perfectly well known beforehand who will be the conqueror. The Abbat is sure to end by throwing them all down, as he did last year.” “The strength of that fellow Pinatel is extraordinary,” the Baron observed; “and he is also a wonderful poacher. If he had belonged to the place, I should have made him the offer of Choiset’s situation some time hence, and in the mean time occupied him as a woodman.”

‘A moment afterwards Madame de Malpeire yawned again, and exclaimed, “This is decidedly very tedious. These fights with the fists are too tiresome. Let us take a turn in the parterre.” I think I have already mentioned that this parterre was a raised platform, supported by the rampart, and surrounded with trellised walks, amongst which meandered a number of narrow paths, edged with box. This little miniature hanging garden of Babylon filled

up all the space in front of the modern part of the castle, and some of the old structures had been smartened up and newly painted in accordance with these recent alterations. At one of the angles of this portion of the building, which was entirely devoted to Madame de Malpeire's apartments, was a little turret, jutting out beyond the wall and overhanging a precipice, the bottom of which was on a level with the plain. In old times this turret was called the watch-tower, and when there were wars or disturbances in the country, a sentinel was placed in a little lodge at the top of it, to give notice of the approach of hostile bands. A slated roof had been substituted for the watchman's sentry-box, and at the height of the first story a large window had been made, the balcony of which hung over a chasm full of briers and dark-coloured mosses. Mdlle. de Malpeire's room was in this tower. As we passed near it the Baronne stopped, and pointing to the balcony with her gold-headed cane, she said to me, "I cannot look out of that window without feeling giddy. My daughter's nerves are stronger than mine. I have often found her musing on a moonlight evening with her elbows resting on the edge of that swallow's nest." I leant over the parapet to measure with my eyes the tremendous height of the wall, and satisfied myself that even if there had been a Romeo in the neighbourhood, that Juliet's balcony was inaccessible.

‘Shortly before sunset loud acclamations arose from the plain, and the pewter dish disappeared from the top of the pole. “It is over,” the Baronne said, peeping through the sticks of her fan. “The victor is proclaimed, and he is crossing the square with his train. They will be coming up here. Let us go in.” It soon became dark, but the peasants lighted pine branches, which they carried in their hands. The flickering light of their torches formed a curious moving illumination as they ascended the hill. From the windows of the drawing-room we saw parties of men parading about the village with a drummer at their head, singing various patriotic songs, and a less numerous band of boys and girls dancing on the green. In a few minutes, Choiset, the gamekeeper, came in. “The Abbat is arrived,” he hastily announced; “there is a great crowd following him. I am come to take M. le Baron’s orders.”

“You will admit no one but the Abbat himself and his twelve companions,” answered the old nobleman; “and if any of the others try to force their way in, you will do as I told you.” “Come,” said the Baronne, smiling, “let us go and give audience to these gallant shepherds. Your hand, M. le Baron. Come with us, my love,” she added, turning to her daughter. Mdlle. de Malpeire followed them, holding in her hand the blue scarf unfolded. She looked very pale, and I saw her hands tremble.

‘They all went down-stairs. I did not follow them; the whole affair was disagreeable to me, and I had not meant to be present at the presentation of the scarf. I remained therefore alone in the drawing-room, standing near a window, and unconsciously gazing on the dark plain. There was no moon, and not a star was to be seen in the sky. The garden and everything beyond it was veiled in profound obscurity. The night wind moaned sadly through the trellised alleys. I leaned my head on my hands, and fell into a melancholy fit of musing, which gradually softened my resentful feelings. The kind of avowal which Mdlle. de Malpeire had volunteered, as it were, to make to me, had created at first in my heart a paroxysm of jealousy and anger, which was almost like hatred. But by dint of turning over in my mind the cruel words she had uttered, I began to think that there was no occasion to attach any importance to them; that it was all an excuse and a subterfuge, a mere threat—that I had not, that I could not, have a rival. If I could be once persuaded of this, I felt I could easily forgive her coldness, endure her scorn. I was ready to fall at the feet of the haughty girl, and to tell her that I should always love, always be devoted to her, without insisting on a return, if such was her will—her whim. As I was indulging in these alternate moods of tenderness and anger, I thought I perceived a figure passing slowly under the window,

keeping close to the wall, like some one feeling his way in the dark. Though there was nothing extraordinary in this, my attention was roused, and I followed with my eyes the indistinct form for some time, but the obscurity was so great that it disappeared without my having been able to discern which way it had gone. A moment afterwards Madame de Malpeire's little dog got up and growled. I turned round; the door of the boudoir which had served me as a studio was ajar. I fancied I heard the sound of a light stealthy footstep on the creaking boards. The impression was so strong, that I called out, "Who is there?" There was no answer. I took a candle, and went into the boudoir; the little spaniel followed me, barking between my legs. The door to the parterre was open. This was often the case in these summer evenings. No one was to be seen, but I fancied I heard the sound of receding footsteps. I concluded that some of the servants had passed that way into the garden, and returned to the drawing-room. About half an hour afterwards Madame de Malpeire came in and threw herself on the sofa, exclaiming, "I am quite exhausted. I have been obliged to rest some time on my way up in Boinet's room. I do not know that I ever laughed so much in my life. I think it is that which has tired me so much."

"Was the reception so very amusing then?" I asked. "O, you shall hear all about it," exclaimed

the good lady, seized with a fresh fit of laughter. "Just picture to yourself. The Abbat and his *cortège* were waiting in the green hall, with their hats off and very respectful, all as it should be. When my daughter came forward, the big fellow went down on his knees in a most gallant fashion to receive the scarf. She stooped over him, and passed it over his chest, whilst the others applauded, making a tremendous noise. At last, when silence was restored, the Abbat stood up and addressed to me a little speech, which gave me time to look at him. Upon my word, that man is a giant. I do not think my feathers reached as high as his elbow. When he had finished his harangue, I turned to the Baron and said, 'Monsieur, may I beg you to make my acknowledgments to that young man. Not knowing the language of the country, I have not been able to understand his speech, but I am not the less delighted with his sentiments.' 'Why, good gracious, madame,' the Baron exclaimed, 'he spoke to you in French!'

"This tickled my fancy so much that I was seized with a fit of laughter which obliged me to hide my face with my fan, and I was at least a quarter of an hour recovering myself. But it all passed off very well, I think. Wine and liquors were plentifully served out to these good people. They drank our healths, I don't know how many times, and are gone away, quite satisfied I presume. But the whole affair

has been dreadfully fatiguing.' As to my daughter, she is quite knocked up by the exertions of the day, and has asked my leave not to appear at supper. She has probably retired to rest by this time. For my part I feel sufficiently refreshed not only to keep you and the Baron company at supper, but to play, if you are so disposed, our usual game at piquet afterwards."

'The Baron then joined us, and said, "There is an immense number of people on the road. They seem to be coming here, but they certainly will not come in. We can sleep in perfect quiet; I have ordered the drawbridge to be taken up." "O," exclaimed his wife, in a jesting manner, "then we are all your prisoners. Nobody can go in and out without your leave."

'We went to supper. I thought, in spite of all his efforts to appear unconcerned, that the Baron was somewhat anxious about the state of things. He fell, however, asleep as usual in his arm-chair, and Madame de Malpeire and I began one of those interminable games at cards, which she often liked to prolong beyond midnight.

'At about eleven o'clock Mdlle. Boinet ran in looking terrified. "I don't know what is going on," she said; "there is a great tumult outside. From this room nothing is heard, but if M. le Baron will go down into the court perhaps he can find out what all

the noise is about." "I daresay they have come to give us a serenade," Madame de Malpeire said, quietly shuffling the cards. "I shall go down and see," the Baron cried, starting up out of his sleep. "Don't move, Champaubert; it is not worth while to interrupt your game." He had hardly left us when the bells of the parish church began to ring. "It is the tocsin," I exclaimed. "Then I suppose a fire has broken out somewhere," Madame de Malpeire answered. "It is a frequent occurrence here, where the houses are all built of wood and thatched with straw. On these *fête* days there is always a beginning of conflagration somewhere or other, because in each cottage they light great fires for the frying with oil which goes on at a great rate on these occasions." "In that case," I replied, "we ought to see the flames from this window," and I went to look out. It was as dark as possible, and the air felt heavy and sultry. It seemed as if a storm was gathering on the mountain. It was impossible to discern the position of the village, except by the mournful sound of the alarm-bell, which fell on the ear with an ominous significance. I could see nothing in the thick darkness, except a multitude of lights moving in the same direction. These were the pine-wood torches carried by the peasantry. They were evidently advancing towards the castle in great numbers, and I was watching this procession with some anxiety when the Baron rushed



into the room with a gun in his hand, one of those heavy muskets formerly used in sieges. "It is a regular sedition, an attack with armed force," he said, with a mixture of self-possession and anger. "There are four or five hundred of them yelling and hooting on the other side of the moat in front of the gate." "But what do they want, I wonder?" the Baronne said, without much distressing herself. "Who knows?" he replied. "Choiset went to the wicket to speak to them, but they only shouted more furiously, and instead of stating their grievances, if they have any, they keep screaming, 'The Abbat, the Abbat!' just as if we had kept him prisoner. Some of them have guns, but the greater number are armed only with pickaxes and ploughshares. There is no danger of their taking us by storm. I am only afraid of one thing, which is that it should occur to them to surprise us on this side by the postern gate." "Would that be possible?" asked the Baronne, beginning to take alarm. He nodded affirmatively, and exclaimed with an oath: "But I undertake to defend that entrance. The first man that appears I shoot down as a dog, and in like manner as many as shall follow, one by one." "O my God, my God!" cried his wife, lifting up her hands, "and my daughter?" "You must bring her here," the Baron replied. "It is from the balcony of her room that I must watch the postern gate." "Have you any directions to

give me?" I asked. "Come with me," he briefly replied.

'Madame de Malpeire took a candle, and we followed her along the passage which led to her daughter's room. "She must be fast asleep," she said, "and her door is always locked inside, but I have my master-key in my pocket. I often go in for a moment to look at her sleeping." She opened the door, and at a glance I took in the principal features of the room. The bed, which had no canopy, was covered with a white counterpane. A large woollen curtain was drawn before the window. Over the mantelpiece, which faced the door, there was an old looking-glass, and at its foot the little figure the Baron had found in his game-bag. At the same time I perceived that Mdlle. de Malpeire was not in her apartment. "She is not here!" exclaimed the Baronne. "What on earth has become of her?"

'My blood ran cold at these words. I remembered the figure I had seen gliding under the window, the light step I had heard in the boudoir, the strange emotion I had felt, the threat implied in the words, which had been ringing in my ears for the last few hours, "You shall soon know." Then, like a flash of lightning, passed through my mind the thought of what the Baron had said of the cries of the mob clamouring for the Abbat. A cold sweat started on my brow. I felt paralysed from head to foot, and

whilst a hasty search was made all over the castle for Mdlle. de Malpeire, I stood rooted to the spot, feeling a horrible certainty that I should never see her again. The Baron came back, looking as pale as death. "She has been carried off," he said in a hoarse voice. "We must rescue her, or die." "I follow you," I cried, but with despair in my heart. The words had scarcely passed my lips when my eyes fell on a letter, which was lying on a table in a corner of the room. I pointed it out to Madame de Malpeire, who seized it and exclaimed, "Read, monsieur, read. It is my daughter's handwriting; it is directed to you."

The Baron opened the letter, and an appalling change came over his face. He read it to the end, gave it into my hand, staggered, and fell heavily on the floor. His wife knelt by him, and called wildly for help. The servants came rushing in. By the time he recovered his senses I had read these words:

"SIR,—The moment is come when everything must be known, when the secrets of my heart must be revealed. I have given my love, I have pledged my hand to a man who, according to the ideas of the world, is not my equal. I love him because he possesses all the virtues of his humble condition, truthfulness, honesty, morality, and simplicity. I am not afraid of poverty with him; his hardy frame is inured to labour. He will share with me the bread earned

by the sweat of his brow. If I fly with him to the honourable shelter of his virtuous parents' roof, it is because an odious tyrannical despotism has driven me to this extremity. It is to escape the horrible misery of being forced into a marriage I abhor. On that account I claimed his protection, and placed myself under his care. Do not think that you can drag me from the refuge I have chosen. Thousands of strong arms and brave hearts will encircle the peasant's bride, and save the noble's daughter from the tyranny which would constrain her to wed a man she does not love. If you would save my honour, if you would secure for the child you once called your own, though now you may curse and disown her, an unblemished name, send me your written consent to my marriage with François Pinatel, that I may become in the eyes of the world the lawful wife of the man with whom I have not feared to fly in the dead of night, to whom I shall have pledged my faith in the presence of a multitude, and whom I never will forsake in life, or in death. I cannot expect that you, sir, and my poor mother will forgive me now, but the day will come when you will do so."

The Baron turned towards me with a calmness more fearful than the most violent burst of passion, and said, "She must marry that man. I shall send my written consent, and when that paper is signed and

gone, then I shall be childless, and forget that I ever had a daughter." After a pause he added, in a tone which even at this distance of time I cannot call to mind without shuddering, "Cursed be the day when she was born! Cursed be the day when God in His anger raised her from amongst the dead! Accursed be her life in this world and in the—" "O, do not say in the next," cried the wretched mother, putting her hand over his mouth. She too had read the letter, and, wringing her hands, she kept repeating, "My girl is mad: my poor girl is gone out of her mind."

'What a terrible night we went through! Everything in me seemed crushed and annihilated. Transports of rage shook me to pieces at one moment, and vague feelings of remorse and pity tortured me the next. The Baron, unable to endure the cries of his wife, who was falling every moment into hysterics, followed me to my room. His grief was gloomy and silent. He walked up and down the room in a restless manner, and sometimes went to the window, as if to breathe. Every noise outside the castle had subsided; evidently the popular excitement was allayed by some unexpected circumstance. The peasants were no longer clamouring before the entrance-gate.

'Between twelve and one o'clock Choiset came into the room, and said, with tears in his eyes, "Forgive me, Monsieur le Baron, if I venture to disturb you, but Madame le Baronne has had a long fainting fit.

We were almost afraid she would die, but now she is a little better and has gone into her room. She asks to see you and Monsieur le Comte."

'We went down-stairs together. As soon as she saw us Madame de Malpeire threw herself on her knees before her husband, and in a voice broken by sobs, cried out, "Monsieur, I cannot, I will not abandon her. You must take pity on that poor deluded child. You must let me go to her; it is my duty, it is my right. I must save her from that horrible wretch. She will soon repent of her fault; then I shall hide her in some convent and shut myself up with her. Religion bids us be merciful. It teaches us that the greatest offences can be expiated by repentance."

"Repentance can win forgiveness at God's hands," the Baron replied, "but it cannot wipe away shame. Our name and our house can never brook disgrace."

'Long and vainly the poor woman pleaded in accents of vehement grief, which thrilled through my own bruised and miserable heart. The Baron continued unmoved. "Nothing," he said, "can efface this shame or redeem the past. There is no option, no possible course to be followed but one. That unfortunate girl has chosen her lot, and she must abide by it. She must marry the man she has eloped with, and be to us as if she had never existed."

'Thus we spent the night, and the dawning light found us sitting together in the same place, pale,

broken-hearted, utterly wretched. Early in the morning the Baron wrote and sent his consent to his daughter's marriage. As she was not yet of age it could not otherwise have taken place.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE EMIGRES.

'THE violent agitation I had gone through, and the struggles I had made not to give way to the excess of my grief before Mdlle. de Malpeire's parents, brought on a state of physical suffering and mental prostration which occasioned great anxiety to those about me, and gave them reason to apprehend that I was seriously ill. Alarming symptoms soon showed themselves, and on the following day the doctor pronounced me to be at death's door. I have preserved only a confused recollection of what took place whilst I was lying in bed with a burning fever and often light-headed. The only thing I distinctly recollect is being haunted by the same continued hallucination. I kept fancying myself a child who had just died, and that I was placed in a coffin and carried along accompanied by funeral chants. The procession stopped at the Pass of Malpeire, and then I opened my eyes, lifted up my shroud, and gazed on the blue sky. This feeling of being dead and coming to life again was constantly re-occurring in

my excited imagination, and I passed alternately from a state of physical prostration to one of violent excitement. At last, however, nature triumphed. I sat up one day, looked about me, and saw a woman sitting by my bedside. It was Madame de Malpeire, but I did not know her again at first, for she wore neither patches nor rouge. She had never left me day or night, and certainly I owed my life, under God, to the devoted care of her husband and herself. My illness had lasted six weeks, and the doctor, who came from D——, had often declared that he did not expect me to live through the night. This doctor was a sharp, clever little old man. He had not been deceived as to the cause of my illness, and as soon as he perceived that I was beginning to recover consciousness and memory, he said to me before Madame de Malpeire, "The air of these mountains is too keen for my patient. Moreover, we must bear in mind that the winter here lasts for eight months consecutively, and that it is likely the snow will soon begin to fall and to make the roads impassable. My opinion is, that M. de Champaubert ought at once to set off. Though he is very weak, I am not afraid of the journey for him. If he cannot ride, nothing will be easier than to carry him in a litter." I moved in a restless manner, and moaned. The effort I had made to sit up had been too much for my feeble strength, and my thoughts began to wander again. "Yes, doctor," I murmured, "you will come with me.



We shall rest on the snow at the Pass of Malpeire, and you will leave me there." "No, no; we shall go on farther," he hastened to reply. "You will go to your father, who is expecting you." "My father!" I said, suddenly struck with a new thought. "Does he know that I am ill? Has he written?" Madame de Malpeire looked anxiously at the doctor, as if uncertain what answer to give. "Tell him everything, madame," he replied. "Speak to him of the letter M. le Baron has received." "A few lines only," she said, bending over me. "A few lines written by your father himself. He is quite well and in a place of safety; but terrible things have happened." The Baron came in at that moment, and it was he who gave me an account of the horrible days, the 5th and 6th of October. My father had taken part in all that then took place. After accompanying the royal family to Paris, subsequently to their unhappy attempt at flight, he had gone home only for a few hours, and on the following day went into voluntary exile. He had emigrated, and it was at Turin he was expecting me to join him.

The doctor hoped that these terrible tidings would serve to divert the current of my thoughts from the one besetting idea which was destroying me. And it did so happen that the shock which this intelligence gave me turned away my attention from my own sufferings, and gave me a sudden energy. I raised myself a little in the bed, and, leaning my elbow on the pillow.

listened to the accounts in the public papers, which the Baron had received at the same time as my father's letter, and which he read aloud to me. The description of the horrible scenes of which they gave the details absorbed all my attention, and for a quarter of an hour I forgot where I was and the havoc which my unfortunate passion had made in my whole being. I forgot Mdlle. de Malpeire. But before the Baron had finished reading, my eyes unfortunately fell on a little green branch, the leaves of which showed themselves against one of the window-panes. It was a sprig of periwinkle that Mdlle. de Malpeire had stuck into her sash one afternoon, and which I had taken possession of when she threw it away, faded and broken, into a corner of the dining-room. The poor slip had taken root, and its light green leaves were beginning to rise above the edge of the flower-pot in which I had placed it, like some rare plant. Instantly my throbbing head fell back on the pillow, and I sank into a bitter train of thought. The Baron read on, but it was no longer what I heard which made my blood boil with indignation or filled my eyes with tears. The old doctor perceived this sudden change, and said in a decided manner, "Well, sir, we must be off to-morrow."

That same evening, Madame de Malpeire was sitting alone by my bedside. I hardly know with what kind of expression I looked at her as I thought of one whose name I could not utter, but the poor woman

burst into tears, and said in a low voice, "I mourn over her as if she were dead." No other explanation took place between us. The wound in my heart was so sore and so deep that I was afraid of increasing my sufferings by touching upon it. I felt that there were things I could not hear mentioned and live.

At about twelve o'clock that night, the Baron and his wife withdrew, after having affectionately squeezed my hand. Mdlle. Boinet lingered for a moment in my room, and wished me good-night with a sorrowful expression, not at all usual to her. "Good-night," I said; "*à revoir* to-morrow." She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and went out without speaking. I remained alone with the maid-servant, who was to sit up with me that night. Hitherto the Baron had slept in my room, not choosing to rely on any one but himself for the minute watching my dangerous illness required. The stout good-natured girl established herself close to my bedside, with her hands folded under her handkerchief. As I did not fall to sleep immediately, she began in her *patois* a sort of unintelligible soliloquy. I gathered from it, however, that she was lamenting over my departure and that of her master and mistress. The monotonous sound of her voice ended by lulling me to rest. My weary, burning eyes at last closed themselves, and for the first time I slept soundly for several consecutive hours.

When I awoke the following morning it was broad

daylight, and the exhilarating rays of the rising sun made their way into every part of my room, the doors and windows of which were wide open. The doctor was already standing by the side of my bed. "Come, come," he said, in a cheerful manner, "you are much better. We must take advantage of this beautiful day, and start in an hour." I suffered myself to be dressed as a child, and leaning on the arm of this kind man I tried to walk a few steps, but I was so weak I could not get as far as the door. "Never mind," he said, encouragingly, as he led me back to my arm-chair. "I have ordered a good litter to be got ready, with thick curtains, and you will be very comfortable. It is at the bottom of the stairs. If you cannot walk, we shall carry you down." "I must first take leave of the Baron and Madame de Malpeire," I said, with a choking sensation in my throat. He answered, "They have spared you the pain of that parting. It would have been an additional trial, which you are not in a state to bear. For several days everything has been prepared for their departure. They only waited till you could be pronounced out of danger, and this very night they have left the castle." "For any long time?" I asked, quite startled at this information. "Most likely for ever," he sadly replied. "They emigrate."

'I was carried down to the litter almost fainting, and allowed myself to be conveyed away without asking where I was going, without casting one look behind

me. The doctor accompanied me on horseback. When we arrived at the Pass of Malpeire he dismounted and opened the curtains of my litter. The open air had revived me. I raised my head and gazed on the melancholy view. The lengthening shadows of the rock had already reached the confines of the gorge. The torrent was brawling in its deep bed, and the yellow autumnal leaves strewing the path. A little bird hopped on the stone where Mdlle. de Malpeire's coffin had rested, and its joyful twitter mingled with the roaring noise of the imprisoned waters. I hid my face in my hands, with a low moan. The doctor bent over me and anxiously inquired how I felt. I pressed his hand, which had taken hold of mine, and made a sign to him to close the curtains. The sight of that place made me feel faint and giddy. My head reeled, and I was seized with a wild desire to throw myself into the abyss and end my life beneath the cold waves of that foaming stream. This sort of delirium ceased as we began to descend the mountain on the other side, when I felt the softer air blowing in my face and the southern sun warming my benumbed limbs. It was thus I departed from a spot where, in a short space of time, I had enjoyed the most transporting dream of happiness and suffered the most severe pangs that the human heart can undergo.

Eight days afterwards I arrived at Turin, where I found my father. The doctor, who had accompanied

me so far, was then obliged at once to return to the little town where he lived. This separation affected me, for I had become attached to him as to a friend whose skill and penetration had been the means of saving my life. Another absurd, strange feeling, which I would hardly acknowledge to myself, made me also regret his departure. He knew Mdlle. de Malpeire; he could have talked to me of her. Just before he went away I had a weak return of passionate tenderness, and taking him apart, I said, in a faltering voice: "Who knows what is the fate of that unhappy girl? I implore you to make some inquiries about her. Perhaps she may have changed her mind at the last moment, and left that man. What, in that case, would become of her? Her parents have disowned and cast her off. There would be no one to lend her a helping hand, should she wish to retrace her steps. This thought makes me miserable. I would give my life to save her—to take her away from that man." The doctor looked at me with a compassionate expression of countenance, and briefly replied: "Believe me—forget her. It is nothing to you now whether she is happy or unhappy; she has the fate she chose for herself."

'My father did not put any questions to me, and I said nothing to him. By a kind of tacit agreement I avoided every allusion to the fatal project of marriage which took me to the Castle of Malpeire and to

the time I spent there. Once, however, my father broke through that silence. It was at the end of the year 1792. We had just arrived at Ostend, where a great number of *émigrés* were preparing, like me, to cross over to England, but I did not seek them out, and whilst my father went to visit some old friends I remained alone at the hotel. I remember that the day was closing in, and the intensely melancholy feeling with which I watched the snow-flakes slowly falling and whitening the roofs of the neighbouring houses, the high-pointed gables of which stood out in dark relief against the pale gray sky. My father came in with a sorrowful countenance, and seated himself by the fire without speaking. This made me feel anxious, for at that time life was made up of incessant fears, and the event generally more than justified the worst apprehensions. "Any news from France?" I asked, trembling at what the answer might be. My father shook his head, and with a manner of great depression said: "I have just heard of the death of an old friend. You know him, Maximin, and although it was under very painful circumstances that your intimacy ended, I am sure you will feel his death very much." "You mean that the Baron de Malpeire is dead," I exclaimed. "Yes, he was carried off suddenly within the last few days," my father answered. "He had been living here some time in a state bordering on destitution." "And Madame de Malpeire?" I asked. "Was she

with him? Have you seen her?" He shook his head sadly. "What, is she, too, dead?" I cried. "She died a good while ago of a broken heart, I think," my father said in a low voice. "The Baron had no one with him in his last moments except a poor servant of his wife's, who had latterly supported him by her work. When I heard all this I tried to find her out. I should have liked to have done something for that faithful creature, but she is gone; she went back to France."

'We sat on some time in silence. At last I said to my father—"And Mdlle. de Malpeire—do you know what has become of her?" He hesitated a moment, and then replied in a way that seemed intended to stop any farther questions, "The family of Malpeire is now quite extinct."

'From that day to this I never uttered again Mdlle. de Malpeire's name, and my father may have thought that I had forgotten her, but it was not so. The remembrance of that first and only affection dwelt in my heart throughout all the years of my youth, and, I am almost ashamed to add, even in a more advanced period of life stood in the way of my marrying. And now I cannot look at that picture without emotion. The sight of it makes my poor old heart thrill as it used to do years ago. The brightest and the most terrible days I have known rise again before me.'



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE HOME OF THE PINATELS.

M. DE CHAMPAUBERT leant his elbow on the table, sighed deeply, and, pouring out a glass of sherry, drank it off. My uncle, who had with difficulty followed all these romantic metaphysics, ejaculated, 'You were really very unfortunate in your first love.' As to me, my heart was bursting with indignation. I could not take my eyes off Mdlle. de Malpeire's picture, and when the Marquis had finished his story I murmured, with a kind of scornful rage, 'That Abbat she was so fond of must be by this time a horrid wrinkled old peasant, bent half double, I daresay, and dressed in tattered clothes. I should like to see him now.'

Whilst M. de Champaubert had been speaking Babelou had looked in at the door more than once. When his narrative came to an end she glided into the room, and going up to the back of my uncle's arm-chair, she whispered in his ear that M. le Curé was come, and asked for a bed, as he was in the habit of doing now and then.

'By all means,' cried Dom Gêrusac; 'he is most welcome. Where is he?'

'In the kitchen drying his cassock,' Babelou replied. 'There was a heavy shower just now, and it is soaked through and through.'

The rain was indeed streaming down the window-panes, and the temperature even in the house had become sensibly colder. •

‘Throw some fagots on the fire,’ Dom Gérusac said; ‘we are freezing here. And get us some more coffee; you know M. le Curé likes it very hot.’

‘My dear Maximin,’ he added, ‘you will let me introduce to you the Abbé Lambert, a worthy priest, who has been for fifteen years Curé of Malpeire.’ •

‘I shall be very glad to make his acquaintance,’ the Marquis eagerly answered. And whilst my uncle went to look after his new guest, he said to me, ‘M. le Curé must, I think, know something as to the fate of the family of Malpeire. He must have heard people talk about them and their misfortunes. Have you ever asked him any questions on the subject?’

‘Yes, I have, monseigneur,’ I answered, getting very red, ‘but he seemed to know nothing about it. Perhaps it was out of a feeling of charity, and because he wished people to forget Mdlle. de Malpeire’s disgraceful history.’

The Abbé Lambert came in with my uncle. His old cassock was still very damp, and the marks which his heavy shoes left on the floor showed that he had been trudging on foot in roads full of clayey mud. But he was in nowise ashamed of his poor appearance, and it was in a manner equally free from embarrassment or familiarity that he returned the greeting of

our distinguished guest, who received the old village priest with as much respect as if he had been a dignitary of the Church, made way for him by his side close to the fire, and stirred up the blaze of the fagots, in order that the poor worn-out cassock might be effectually dried.

• ‘My dear Curé, I am delighted that your flock is scattered over these mountains and valleys,’ said Dom Gêrusac with a smile. ‘We should not have had the pleasure of seeing you to-night if you had not some parishioners to visit in this neighbourhood.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ he replied, with somewhat of sadness in his tone. ‘It is a case requiring my ministry that brought me here to-night, a pressing sick call, and I was afraid of being too late. It is a long walk from Malpeire here, and in this stormy weather the torrents may swell at any moment, so as to impede the way.’

After the Abbé Lambert had dried his clothes and drunk a cup of coffee, M. le Champaubert began discreetly to sound him as to the time of his arrival in those parts, and the reports he might have happened to hear concerning the former lords of the soil. The Abbé Lambert seemed aware of the interest which prompted M. de Champaubert to make these inquiries, and he spared him the necessity of more direct questioning by saying, in a grave, sad voice:

‘When I came here, about sixteen years ago, the

family of Malpeire was almost forgotten. Even the melancholy event which preceded their departure was hardly ever alluded to.

‘But you know of it!’ exclaimed the Marquis. ‘You had heard of the only daughter of the late Baron, Mdlle. de Malpeire?’

The good old priest raised his eyes and hands to heaven, and said, in an earnest and impressive manner, ‘May God have mercy on the soul of that poor woman! And you must also forgive her; she has atoned for her guilt by severe sufferings—’

‘You have been yourself acquainted with Mdlle de Malpeire,’ interrupted M. de Champaubert, greatly agitated; ‘you can tell me what has been the end of her unhappy life.’

‘It is a shocking history,’ murmured the Abbé Lambert, shaking his head as if beginning to hesitate about recalling that painful remembrance. But the Marquis would take no denial, and he then said, ‘I little thought where and in what company I should relate the history of that poor sinner. God in His mysterious providence has, I suppose, thus ordained it.’ He paused for a minute or two, and then went on:

‘At the time of Mdlle. de Malpeire’s elopement I was Curé of St. C——, a little village of Provence, in the diocese of Aix. François Pinatel’s family lived in that place. He went by the name of the Abbat, be-

cause in all the village *tites* he was leader or prince of the young men. The Pinatels belonged to that old race of peasantry which, for three or four hundred years, have been in possession from father to son of a piece of ground of their own, and cultivated it themselves. The mother, an honest, hard-working woman, with a sharp eye after profits and gain, managed the household. She had married her eldest son to a girl who had for her portion a plot of ground worth about a thousand crowns, and she lived on very comfortable terms with her daughter-in-law. She came one day to tell me the news of her second son's marriage with Mdlle. de Malpeire. The widow Pinatel was by no means dazzled by the noble alliance. "Everything is not gold that glitters," she said. "Not a word had been breathed about a marriage portion; and as the parents will not see or speak to the girl, it is most likely they will disinherit her. It is not in any way a marriage that suits us. What shall we do at home with this fine young lady? Does she think that we are going to be her humble servants? I can tell her it will be no such thing. And what a figure she will look amongst us in her smart gowns? They will laugh at us in the village, and I shall be almost ashamed of being seen with her. For my part, I have no opinion of those handsome women. They are always thinking of their faces and their dress. There is not a bit of use in them. I am cer-

tain my eldest son, when he comes home, will be out of sorts about this marriage. But it is of no good talking; François brought her to the farm, and there was nothing for it but to get them married. •But I wish with all my heart—that I do—that this made-moiselle had never darkened our doors.” I did all I could to make her look on her son’s marriage in a different light, and to persuade her to welcome with a more Christian spirit the young stranger who had become a member of her family. But though a good woman as the world goes, Madame Pinatel had none of the religious principles which would have made her susceptible of the sort of feelings I tried to instil into her, and all my efforts were useless.

‘Just at that time I was summoned to Aix by the Bishop for a work which had been begun the year before, and which he wished me to finish under his eyes. I was absent from my parish about two months, and it was near Christmas when I came home. I arrived late one evening, having walked part of the way, and as a cold drizzling rain was beginning to fall, I hastened towards the dwelling-place of the Pinatels, which stood on the roadside about a mile from the village. Their house was a large ill-constructed building, the walls of which had never been plastered. Properly speaking, it had neither sides nor front. The windows seemed to have been made here and there without any definite plan, and were without

panes or blinds. The entrance-door opened upon a sort of yard, encumbered with rubbish, piles of brush-wood, and heaps of manure. There was not a tree about the house, or the least appearance of a garden. In summer a burning sun turned the outside of this habitation into a furnace, and in the winter the icy mistral blew in unopposed through the rotten boards of the old outside shutters. It was very dark, and as I was crossing the yard, feeling my way with my stick, I heard somebody before me exclaiming, "François, is that you at last?" I advanced and named myself, upon which the person who had spoken turned abruptly round towards the house, and disappeared. I pushed open the door which stood ajar, and passing through the stable, entered the room where the family usually sat. It was a tolerably large apartment, but so dark and smoky that at first it was difficult to discern anything in it. The widow Pinatel's bed was in one corner, screened from sight by curtains of yellow serge. Her great wooden cupboard, always carefully locked up, stood opposite to three or four shelves, upon which the crockery and the saucepans were placed in grand array. The wall was adorned with the pewter dishes won by the Abbat, and some of the household provisions were always hanging against it.

'When I walked in, the family was sitting round a table upon which was lying a large heap of wheat. The grains were being sifted one by one for the pur-

pose of removing the mildew, which is apt to spoil the flour. This occupation was carried on by the dim light of a snuffy lamp, and they all applied themselves to this ant-like labour with extraordinary activity. When I appeared, Madame Pinatel got up and said, "O dear, you have had to cross the stable without a light, M. le Curé. We never heard you coming. You found the door open, then?" "There was somebody in the yard," I replied; "I think it was your new daughter-in-law looking out for her husband." The widow shrugged her shoulders, and the eldest son muttered between his teeth, "In that case she is likely to spend the night out of doors." "Is François gone up to the mountain?" I asked, thinking it possible that he might have been to Malpeire, where great damage had been done after the Baron's departure. It was reported that the peasants had pillaged the castle and burnt part of the buildings. "What business would he have there?" replied the widow; "he is gone in another direction. You see, M. le Curé, he is a lad that can never stay long together at home. He is gone to amuse himself at the fair at Apt." I sat down in the post of honour, under the projecting chimneypiece. Two small logs were slowly burning on the hearth, and though the hour of supper was past, an enormous iron pot was still simmering amidst the ashes. The Provençal peasants' idea of politeness is to take upon themselves the whole



burden of conversation, so that the visitors should not be at the trouble of answering. The eldest Pinatel accordingly began to descant upon the drought, which had been unfavourable for the sowing, and on the extraordinary size of two fat pigs which he had sold at the last fair of St. C——. Whilst he was giving me every kind of detail on this subject, his young sister-in-law silently slipped into the room, and seated herself in the corner of the chimney opposite to me; her clothes were wet, and she was shivering with cold. “Do not leave, another time, the door open when you go out in the evening, daughter-in-law,” the widow Pinatel said to her in a sharp tone of voice. “How can I come in again if I shut it behind me?” she replied, with a scowl on her face. No one took any farther notice of her. The eldest son went on with his account of the sale of his pigs. The other brothers had also their say in the matter, and an animated discussion arose as to the size and weight of the animals. In the mean time I was looking at the young wife with a mixture of curiosity and compassion. She was dressed like Madame Pinatel, in a brown drugget petticoat, and her cap of printed calico tied under her chin entirely concealed her hair. The white smoothness of her face was so remarkable that it almost seemed made of marble. She made up the fire a little, shivering all the time in her wet clothes, and holding her head down, as if afraid that I should

speaking to her. Seeing this was the case, I did not say a word, and even took care not to look at her any more. But I threw into the hearth some logs that were lying near me, and moved a little aside the iron pot, that she might put her feet on the ashes. When she had warmed herself, she leant back against the wall with her arms crossed over her chest, and closed her eyes like a person who dozes overpowered with fatigue. The rain continued to fall, and I stayed on till late in the evening. During all that time the young woman never moved, or opened her eyes. At last, just as I was going away, thinking the bad weather would last all the night, somebody whistled in the yard, and the house-dog ran to the door wagging his tail. "It is François!" exclaimed the young woman, starting up and rushing to meet her husband.

'The others did not move. The widow Pinatel, casting a glance at the place her daughter-in-law had just left, muttered, "I only hope she has kept the soup warm."

'A moment afterwards the Abbat came in, and throwing his stick and heavy woollen cloak into a corner, said in a cheery manner, "Good-evening to you all. M. le Curé, how do you do?—and you, mother, is it all right with you?" "Well, I suppose one must always say yes to that," she answered; "and you, son, how do you feel yourself?" "Why, not amiss as times go," he cried; and then patting his

stomach, added with a loud laugh, "but I daresay better soon." "You have had no supper?" asked his mother. "Then come and sit down here;" she made room for him by her side at the table, and turning to his wife said, "Come, daughter-in-law, get your husband's supper." The young woman did as she was bid, and fetched a large loaf of brown bread, and a basinful of soup with vegetables. Unfortunately, the soup was cold, which made the Abbat cross and the widow angry. "My gracious!" she exclaimed; "what have you been about? It really is enough to make one laugh to see a person of your age who cannot learn to keep a pot boiling on the fire. It is lucky that everybody here is not so helpless as you," she added, glancing approvingly at her favourite daughter-in-law. "When my eldest son comes home, he always finds his wife hard at work, and something hot and snug by the fire for his supper. If you want to be a good housewife, you had better learn a lesson from your sister-in-law."

"As long as François does not complain, you have no business to find fault with me," she answered in an arrogant tone. I hastened to say that it was my fault if the Abbat's supper was cold; that I had meddled with the saucepan. "François will excuse it," I added; "I shall not be so stupid another time." "There is nothing to be angry about," he said to the two women; "the soup is very well as it is. So all

is for the best ; let us hear no more about it. Do you know that the fair turned out a poor concern after all ? There were neither buyers nor sellers, and not a creature with so much as a piece of five francs in his pocket. And then the weather turned cold yesterday. Snow fell on the Luberon, and I had to come back through roads where a dog would not like to travel. I was ankle deep in mud all the time, and my feet are like icicles." "Make haste then and put some hot ashes in your shoes," the widow Pinatel cried ; "there is nothing like it to prevent a chill."

"Here, wife," the Abbat said, taking off his thick hob-nailed shoes, the leather of which was covered with a thick coating of frozen mud ; "take my shoes and manage it for me." She scraped off the mud without saying a word, put in each shoe a shovelful of ashes, and brought them back to her husband.

'Seeing her so humbled and so cruelly punished for her fault, I could not but hope that she would have recourse to those religious consolations which alone could support and strengthen her amidst the many trials which must necessarily await her, and I went away praying and trusting that her soul would turn to God, and seek peace in His love and service.'

## CHAPTER X.

## THE FARM AND THE FAIR.

‘ON the Sunday which followed my visit to the Pinatels, François’ wife did not make her appearance at church, nor did she go to her duties at Christmas. The Pinatels were certainly by no means fervent Christians, but still the women of the family were tolerably regular in their attendance at church. I asked the widow why her daughter-in-law did not come with her, and what she was doing at home. “Nothing, as usual,” the woman answered. “There she sits at the corner of the chimney, with her arms crossed and her feet in the ashes. If her petticoats happened to catch fire, I don’t believe, Heaven forgive me, that she would stretch out her hand to put it out.”

‘I was in the habit of visiting the different families in my parish once or twice a month, according to what I supposed to be their need of spiritual advice or consolation, and only under exceptional circumstances broke through this rule. A fortnight therefore elapsed before I went again to the Pinatels. This time I found the young woman alone. She was sitting in the sun near the door of the house, her peasant’s hat overshadowing her eyes, so that she only saw me when I was within a few steps of her. She

seemed disagreeably surprised, and starting up suddenly, said in Provençal, "There is nobody at home. They have all been out in the fields since morning." I answered in French, "If I am not in your way, I will sit down and rest a little while." She had probably fancied that I knew nothing of her former position, for she blushed and seemed surprised that I did not speak to her in the dialect of the country, as I did to the other members of the family. But she soon recovered her self-possession, and with the air and manner she would have had in her mother's drawing-room, she said, "Will you do me the honour to walk into the house?" I thanked her, but declined; and we remained seated on the bench outside.

'The weather happened to be wonderfully mild for the time of the year. The birds hopped joyously amongst the bushes, and the little snowdrops were beginning to peep out in the sheltered spots under the hedges. "What a beautiful day it is!" I said to the pale, stern young creature by my side. "I always think this bright sunshine is like a look of love—the love of a merciful God—on the works of His hand. The most deeply afflicted soul ought to be cheered by these benignant rays, which seem to give new life to all creation. We feel that God is our Father, and that He watches over us." She did not answer, but looked at me in that sneering, offensive way which persons who have no religion always put on with

priests when they endeavour to suggest to them thoughts of faith, gratitude, and love of God. I had often met with this sort of contemptuous treatment at the hands of men imbued with the prejudices of philosophical intolerance, and I had sometimes been insulted by impious boasters who gloried in abusing the habit I wear, but the hostile, unfriendly manner of this young woman took me painfully by surprise. I went on to speak of the great consolations which the practice of Christian duties affords, but my words had an effect quite contrary to what I intended. They provoked an outburst I little expected, and which revealed opinions I could never have imagined to exist in a person of her age and sex. She began at once to argue, or rather to hold forth, explaining her views, and calling into question the teachings, not only of the Church, but of the Holy Scriptures. I was amazed in discovering in so young a woman such false and presumptuous ideas, such obstinacy in error, and a sort of impassioned scepticism. She had a mind at once arrogant and disputatious, which was easily worked up to excitement, and a heart which nothing seemed to soften and touch. There was not an atom in her of what the world calls tenderness and sensibility, but she possessed an impetuous imagination, full of false enthusiasm. As I sat listening to her, I could perfectly understand how her unbridled passions had misled her, from one folly and one fault

to another, into her present miserable position. I was young myself at that time, and had not yet learnt to fathom the fearful depths of the human conscience. I was so shocked at the state of that unhappy soul that I began silently to pray for her with all my heart, and to beseech our Blessed Lord to dispel by a miracle of grace her miserable pride. Whilst I was thus pouring forth secret supplications to the divine mercy for her, the young woman, who fancied she had humbled and silenced me, said in a light tone, "There is an end of the argument. Let us talk of something else." I knew that I could give her some useful advice with regard to her position and the line of conduct she would do well to follow with regard to her husband's relations, but she did not let me finish what I had to say. "I know very well what I have to expect," she interrupted. "These people detest me, and nothing will ever alter their feelings towards me; and I must own, that if they hate me, I hate them just as much. We must, however, put up with one another on both sides till the widow Pinatel can pay her son the sum that is due to him from his father's inheritance. It is only thirty louis; but with that we shall be able to hire and stock a small farm, which we shall manage ourselves. My husband has been already looking out for something of the kind, and has heard of a place that would just suit us. It is a property belonging to an *émigré*, so it will be long



before the owner comes back. The worst of it is that we must wait till next Michaelmas, almost a whole year. But never mind ; I must have patience." This plan appeared to me very questionable, and I ventured to observe that it would be difficult to make it answer. "You are not used to work," I said ; "and in spite of all your energy and good will, it will be hardly possible for you to accustom yourself to a life of so much labour and fatigue. Moreover, your husband will not be perhaps as much of a help to you as you fancy. He has never followed the plough or handled the spade like his brothers." "You may as well speak plainly," she replied, very composedly. "He is an idle fellow ; and not only idle, but also addicted to drinking and gambling. I know his character very well. It is all his mother's fault. She has suffered him from his boyhood to haunt the fairs and markets, where he associates with horse-dealers and gipsies, and all sorts of vicious and profligate people. Even since we have been married she tolerates, and even seems to approve of, his frequent absences from home." She even goes so far as to help him to find excuses for getting away from me. When we have a farm of our own he will not be able to wander about the country. I shall manage to keep him at home then. He will leave off loitering in the public-houses ; he will lead a quiet industrious life, the appointed lot of man on earth, and fulfil all

the duties of a good citizen and the head of a family."

'Christian charity compelled me to hold my tongue; but any one the least acquainted with François Pinatel must have been aware that he would never be able to earn his livelihood by agricultural labour, and that he was only capable of exertion when he had occasion to display his extraordinary strength. He had none of the qualities requisite for a farmer—patience, perseverance, shrewdness, circumspection, activity, and, above all, strict economy. He was a thick-skulled, good-hearted, merry wight, easily led astray, and subject to sudden outbursts of passion. In spite of all his defects, he had always been his mother's favourite child, and she perfectly knew his character. With great prudence she had taken care not to make over to him his share of the paternal inheritance; but, on the other hand, when this her prodigal son came home, his piece of bread and basin of soup were always forthcoming.

'It would have been vain to try and explain to the young wife the sort of tutelage her husband required, and which she would never herself be able to exercise. I therefore only begged her not to undertake anything without her mother-in-law's advice, and withdrew with the sad consciousness that I had not succeeded either in enlightening her as to

the perils of her immortal soul, or even as to the questions relating to her temporal interests.

‘A few days afterwards I left St. C——, Monseigneur d’Aix having appointed me to other functions. My flock thus passed under the spiritual care of another Curé. The most disastrous days of the Revolution were then at hand; the Church was threatened with an impending schism, and the priests who refused to adhere to the civil constitution of the clergy with persecution. During several months I went from place to place in the diocese, enlightening the undecided, and strengthening the courage of the weak. Towards the end of my circuit I came to S——, a small town about five miles from St. C——. It was then about the beginning of October, and nearly a year since I had left my parish. I arrived on the eve of the fair, which is one of the principal ones in that part of the country, and the occasion of a great concourse of people. It is a market as well as a fair, and on the last three days a festival. Opportunities of temptation and ruin are never wanting at gatherings like these. \*Gambling goes on at a frightful rate, high stakes are played for, and important affairs transacted. The kind of people who live by cheating their neighbours flock there in numbers.

‘The next morning as I was coming out of the vicarage where I lodged, I met the Abbat. He was dressed in a new suit of clothes, and was going towards

the site of the fair, with a bustling consequential air and manner. I went up to him to inquire after his relations. He answered, "They were all well when I came away. My mother is just the same as ever; straight as an arrow, and as active as a girl of fifteen. My wife also is pretty well, though she looks thinnish." "Are you here alone?" I asked. "My eldest brother was coming with me, but he could not manage to get away," he replied. "You must know, M. le Curé, that my hands are pretty full of business just now. I have taken a farm of three hundred perches of land in one lot. It is no small affair, I can tell you, to cultivate such a property as that. I have already engaged a man to drive the oxen, a shepherd, and a ploughman; and now I am going to buy a pair of oxen, a horse, and a hundred sheep. And then we must have corn to last us till the next harvest." "All that will cost you a good round sum," I said. He tapped his leathern belt, making the money within it jingle, and, lowering his voice, said, "I have seven hundred francs here, which my mother brought me in her apron just as I was coming away." Thereupon we parted, and went our different ways. About an hour after, as I was crossing the market-place, I saw him going into a sort of *café* where well-to-do farmers, rich horse-dealers, and most of those who come to the fair with well-filled purses, were wont to congregate. I knew that gambling went on there, and that the stakes were

very high ; but it never entered my mind that François Pinatel would adventure himself in such society, or be tempted to play at *vendôme*, a ruinous game of hazard. He was in the habit of keeping with the younger men, and I thought as soon as he had transacted his business he would be sure to go and wrestle with them or shoot at the target.

‘ In the afternoon I went into the olive-groves to say my Office, and it was late before I returned from my walk. As I was coming back into the town I met the Abbat without his hat, which in the case of a peasant is a sign of the greatest agitation of mind. He was walking to and fro, heedless of the passengers, whom he elbowed without mercy. As soon as I appeared, he rushed up to me and said, “ M. le Curé, can you lend me a piece of six francs ? ” “ I have only one of three francs,” I replied. “ It is very much at your service ; but in the first place you must tell me what has happened ; ” and taking him by the arm I forcibly drew him away from the crowd to a quiet spot where nobody could overhear us. He suffered himself to be led like a child, and would not answer at first any of the questions I put to him ; but suddenly rousing himself, he told me with a volley of oaths, intermingled with bursts of grief, that he had lost at play every penny he possessed. It was not the time for reproaches, or for trying to move him to repentance ; all I could do was to try and soften his despair. But he

had one of those excitable, unreasoning natures which must give full vent to their violence before it can subside. He kept repeating over and over again; "My mother! O, what will my mother say? I had rather die than go home. I am not afraid of death. It is so easy to throw oneself headlong into a well." I shuddered at the thought that if left to himself he might commit such a crime, and that neither the sense of God's justice nor the fear of eternal punishment would be sufficient to restrain him from self-destruction. In the midst of his bursts of passion he had moments of weakness, when he would sit down; and hiding his face in his hands, moan and weep like a woman. I took advantage of one of those intervals to say to him in an authoritative manner, "Now, my dear Pinatel, there is only one thing to do. You must go back at once to St. C——, and, relying on your mother's kindness, own to her what has happened." "No, no," he exclaimed; "I tell you I never will show my face at home. I will go away, and nobody shall ever hear of me again." "Get up," I said; "get up at once and come. I shall go with you." By degrees his refusals became less positive, and at last he yielded and we started.

I tried as we went along to make him feel how wanting he had hitherto been in his duties to God and to his family, and spoke of the way in which he might in future make amends for his faults. He listened

with deference to my observations, but I cannot say I had the consolation of hearing at that time from his lips one word of real repentance. He soon calmed down, however, and his natural recklessness and levity got in some measure the better of his grief. Before we were half-way to St. C——, he had recovered sufficient composure to enable him to give me a detailed account of the misfortune which had befallen him. "I will tell you the real truth," he said, with a sigh. "I wanted to buy a gold chain for my wife. That was the cause of it all. A gold chain costs, you see, about sixty francs. When my eldest brother married he gave his wife a chain. I was vexed that I had not been able to make the same present to my wife. The fact is, that my mother would not listen to reason about it; not that she is partial to my eldest brother—God forbid that I should say such an untruth—but she takes things into her head, you see. And three women in a house are just like three nuts in a bag. Now my sister-in-law is jealous of my wife because they call her in the village the fair peasant; and, on the other hand, my wife is vexed because my brother's wife shows off her gold chain on Sundays, as if on purpose to taunt her with it." "I do not think your wife can care about that sort of thing," I said, in hopes of cutting short what threatened to prove a long digression. "O, but I can tell you she does," he replied, and went on: "Well, to come back to what I was saying, I wanted

to buy a gold chain, and I had only just money enough to pay for the stock and a few sacks of corn. It suddenly came into my head to try my luck at *vendôme*. I went into the *café* with a piece of six francs in my hand, but quite resolved not to risk a penny more. It was Nicholas Fidelier that held the stakes. He had a heap of gold louis in front of him. I threw in my six francs, and unfortunately won ; upon which I instantly staked three louis, and lost them. This made a hole in the price of the pair of oxen. . I risked three more louis, and lost again. The blood began to rush to my head. I said to myself that the next time luck was certain to turn, and I staked and lost six louis more. The whole price of the pair of oxen was gone. I threw down a louis on the board just to try once again. The banker's card was drawn, and that time I won. Somebody behind me said that now I should be sure to win, because the banker had crossed his little finger with his thumb, which was a certain sign of bad luck. This put me into spirits, and I played on without reckoning, and lost again. Seventeen louis went in that way. I could still have bought the sheep and a little corn, but I had engaged the man to take care of the oxen, and the ploughman, and so that would not do. I played on, and lost everything up to my last piece of twelve sous—up to my last farthing ; and then, as ill luck would have it, I borrowed from Jean Paul, a neighbour of ours, four pieces of six francs, which I



now owe him. You were quite right not to let me have your piece of three francs. It would have gone the way of the others. I might have known this morning that some misfortune would befall me, for as I was going out of the house I met a black dog running after a hen."

"I exclaimed against this gross superstition, and tried to make him feel ashamed of it. But he would not give in about it, and added, "It was just the same two years ago, when I went to Malpeire for the first time. I should have done well then to turn back again. Only think: just as I was setting out, I saw a crow flying lower than the top of our hen-coop. If my poor dear mother had known it, she would never have let me leave home that day. It is not that I exactly repent of my marriage; but you see, M. le Curé—I speak to you as a friend, and I don't mind saying it to you—the peasant who marries a lady brings into his house the seven capital sins in person." "How can you say anything so shocking?" I said indignantly. "Well, if not the whole seven, four or five of them at least," he quietly subjoined. "Hold your tongue, unhappy man," I said. "It is shameful of you to talk in this manner, after misleading that young girl into marrying you." "I did not mislead her a bit," he replied. "As sure as that I must die one day, I never made up to her. The first time I went to Malpeire for the St. Lazarus, about two years ago, she was

present at the games. After the wrestling-match was over there was a ball, and I was her partner. It was no doubt a great honour, but I declare I should have liked better to have been with my friends, who had agreed to sup together on a rabbit-pie. She spoke to me in a pretty smiling sort of a way, and, as in duty bound, I answered in the best way I could. Before we parted she said some civil things I did not at all expect. I stayed at Malpeire because she asked me, and she used to give me *rendezvous*, harmless ones, in all conscience. She stood up there on the terrace of the castle, and I down there under a tree at the entrance of the village. We looked at each other and spoke by signs. Sometimes I went under her window, and she threw down bits of ribbon. You see it was all nothing but folly and nonsense, and it never entered my head that the end would be a marriage in the church. But that was what she wanted, that headstrong girl, and she contrived to have her way about it. Well, well, perhaps her father and mother will think better of it, and may forgive her one of these days."

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE NIGHT AFTER THE FAIR.

‘WHEN we came near St. C——, and in sight of the house, the Abbat began to tremble, and to regret that he had come. “I cannot go in,” he exclaimed; “I shall never have courage to go up to my mother and tell her what I have done—I had rather die.” “Well, I will go in first,” I said, “and break to your mother this sad news.” “O, yes, M. le Curé,” he cried, greatly relieved, “you will tell it her before everybody. You see, I am only afraid of the first moment; as soon as they all know of it, I shall come in. Beg my mother to forgive me; tell her she must.” “And your wife—your unhappy wife?” I said reproachfully. “O, as to her,” he answered, “I am not afraid; she will forgive me fast enough.”

‘We went up to the door. The Abbat stayed outside. I charged him not to go away, and went in myself. All the family were seated round the table at supper. I suppose my countenance betrayed uneasiness, for as soon as the widow Pinatel saw me she exclaimed, “O my good Lord! Has some misfortune happened? What are you come to tell me, M. le Curé?” I entreated her to be calm, and to make up her mind to submit to the will of God, for that I had indeed a painful bit of news to give her. “It must be about François,” she cried, beginning to tremble;

"all the others are here. My boy, my poor boy! What has happened to him?" The Abbat's wife came up to me, looking pale and anxious, but she did not say anything. "What has happened to my son?" the widow exclaimed in a voice of despair. "You will see him in a moment," I answered; "he is alive and well, but something very sad has happened to him." I then gave a brief account of what had occurred. I added that François was deeply penitent, and that it was grief and shame which prevented him from coming in. She listened to me in silence, and then, raising her eyes to heaven, murmured, "God be praised; I thought a worse misfortune had befallen us. I was afraid my poor boy was dead. Let him come in, M. le Curé—I won't reproach him. It was his own money, and it is very sad that he should have made such bad use of it, but nobody has any right to quarrel with him about it." The Abbat had crept into the room, and when he heard what his mother said, he came in and threw his arms about her neck in a transport of gratitude. "Don't be afraid, my poor boy," she cried, with a somewhat ostentatious display of maternal affection and generosity; "there will always be bread enough for you in your mother's house." His brothers shook hands with the Abbat, and made room for him at the table, but his wife remained aloof and did not utter a word. She was sitting in a corner of the room, with her hands on her knees and her head hanging down.

He went up to her and spoke in a whisper, as if trying to appease her, but she listened in gloomy silence, without raising her head or making any answer. He renewed his entreaties, and tried gently to make her turn her face towards him. Then her fury broke out. "Leave me alone!" she exclaimed in a loud voice, and standing up with a look of terrible anger. "You are a wretch, unworthy of my notice. Do you suppose I am going to share the bread which, as a beggar, you will receive from your family? No. As you have not chosen to go out of this house with me, I shall go away alone, and leave you on the dunghill where you were born, mean vagabond that you are." The Abbat turned pale with rage and raised his hand; she drew back with a cry. Everybody rose and rushed towards them. The widow Pinatel seized her son by the arm and held him back. I went up to the young woman, who was standing upright against the wall, looking straight before her with a fixed gaze. One of her cheeks was of a deadly white, the other crimson. "He has struck me," she said, with a fearful expression of countenance; and then, without listening to me, without saying a word or looking at any one, she walked out of the room, and we heard her going up the stairs and uttering terrible curses.

"Hold your tongue," cried the Abbat, "or else I—" "Leave her alone," cried the widow, compelling him to sit down; "do not put yourself in the

wrong. She began by insulting you, and you punished her. Now you must make friends and try and live peaceably together." "Well, we shall see about that," he muttered; "but, do you know, that if you, my own mother, had said such things to me, I really think I should have flown at you."

'It was getting late, and I had to go back to S—— that same evening. The eldest Pinatel offered to accompany me, as he had business to transact the following day at the fair. Just as we were starting the widow seemed to have a presentiment. She turned to the Abbat, and said, in an anxious manner, "You ought to go and sleep at S——. Your wife is very angry, and if you speak to her again to-night, something worse may happen than what took place just now." "Do you think I am afraid of her?" he answered, half affronted. "I'll tell you what, mother, she sha'n't insult me another time as she did just now."

'We went our way. The weather was fine, the full moon shining on our road. Before losing sight of the house I turned my eyes once more towards it, and uttered an earnest prayer for the proud and rebellious soul I had left behind me. Alas, I ought to have been pleading for another soul then about to appear before the judgment-seat of God!

The Abbé Lambert sighed deeply, and again seemed reluctant to proceed with his narrative, but M. de Champaubert, in an agitated voice, implored him

to finish it. Upon which, with what appeared a painful effort, he went on.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘this was what happened. On the following day, as I was going to the church, I saw some one on the high-road in the direction of St. C——, walking very fast, and coming my way. This man, as he passed me, called out, “There was a murder last night at the Pinatels’. The fair peasant has killed her husband; I am going to Aix for the police.”’

When M. de Champaubert heard these words he hid his face in his hands, and uttered a deep groan. I shuddered and turned my eyes away from the picture, as if the criminal had been really present.

‘Well, she was certainly a very wicked woman,’ my uncle ejaculated.

‘I at once determined,’ the Abbé said, ‘instead of going on to the church, to hasten to St. C——. Before I arrived there I met another man, who confirmed the terrible account I had heard from the messenger. “It is the fair peasant who has committed the crime,” he said, “there is not the least doubt about it. Last evening she quarrelled with her husband. They went to bed, however, as usual, and nothing was heard in the night. But this morning, the wife of the eldest son, who got up at daybreak to bake, as she passed by their room felt her foot slipping in something, which turned out to be blood, which she then perceived to be oozing out from under the door. She screamed for help, and

the two young Pipatels, who were just going off to the vineyard, heard her. They ran up-stairs, and found their brother lying murdered in his bed. It would seem as if she had stabbed him in his first sleep, for he had evidently not moved. Just now, when I came away, he was still alive, but was expected every minute to breathe his last." "And that woman?" I asked, with a shudder. "They don't know where she is," he answered, "but they are gone in search of her. She must have escaped across the fields, for the door of the house was found open. But it is impossible she can escape; the whole village are after her, bent on avenging the Abbat." I hurried on, begging God with all my heart to give me time to prepare that unhappy man to appear before Him. As I approached the house I heard cries and sobs, which made me afraid all was over. The room down-stairs was full of people, for the Pinatels held a certain position in the village. I was told the Abbat was still alive, but not conscious. I made my way up the sort of ladder which served as stairs, and into a dimly-lighted room, where all the family were gathered round the Abbat, who was lying in the position of a man asleep. A white sheet covered the bed, and only his face was to be seen resting against the pillow. His mother was bending over him with inexpressible grief, and kept now and again speaking to him, as if she hoped he could hear her. When I came in she exclaimed, "Yesterday



you brought him back full of life and health, and now he is about to die ! That she-wolf murdered him in his sleep like a poor helpless lamb."

"I must try to help him," I said, and with a strong feeling of faith in my heart I knelt down on the opposite side of the bed. I fancied the Abbat moved then and opened his eyes. The doctor arrived at that moment. He raised the sheet, and after having ascertained that the pulse was still beating, he leaned over the dying man to listen to his almost imperceptible breathing. Then he came round to my side of the bed, and looking at me shook his head. "Is there no hope?" I asked in a low voice. "Not the slightest," he answered. "The poor fellow has only a few minutes to live. It would have been over long ago but for the extraordinary strength of his constitution. Life does not easily withdraw from that young and vigorous frame."

"I went close to the Abbat and felt for his hand. "My son, my dear son," I said to him, "if you wish God to forgive you raise up your heart to Him now. Pray with me ; pray for your wife and forgive her ; you have only a moment more to live, but that moment may purchase the pardon of all your sins. Do you hear me, my dear son ? Are you sorry for all your sins, and do you forgive your wife in the hope that God will forgive you ?"

"He made an effort to speak, but failed. I had,

however, the unspeakable consolation of feeling his hand feebly grasping mine in token of assent, upon which I gave him absolution. He turned his languid eyes towards me and then towards his mother. A few moments after François Pinatel gave up his penitent and ransomed soul into the hands of his Maker.'

## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT BECAME OF THE PICTURE.

'WHEN I returned to S——, I heard that the wretched criminal had been arrested and put into prison at Aix. It was not possible for me to visit her, for at that time none but the priests who had taken the oath could enter the State prisons. The only thing I could do was to write her a letter, in which I said everything which Christian charity could say to excite her to contrition and to save her from despair. I had the satisfaction of ascertaining that my letter had reached her.

'In times of popular commotion and political disturbances the law deals silently, as it were, with great criminals, and on that account the unhappy woman escaped a horrible celebrity. After lingering in prison for about a year, she appeared before the tribunals which had been substituted for the old parliamentary courts, and was tried and condemned according to

the newly enacted laws. She was sentenced to be branded by the executioner, and to imprisonment for life. I was not in France at that moment, the violence of the persecution had compelled me to take refuge in the States of the Church, and by the time I heard of her sentence, she had already undergone a part of it. When I returned from exile, the whole affair was nearly forgotten. I only learned that the fair peasant, as she was still called, was in the penitentiary of Embrun, and that the widow Pinatel had died, of grief as it was supposed, because the judges had not sentenced her daughter-in-law to death.'

'And since then you have heard nothing of that unhappy woman?' exclaimed M. de Champaubert.

The Abbé Lambert hesitated a little, as if he felt some scruple about giving a direct answer to that question. At last he said, 'I subsequently learnt that by her sincere penitence and exemplary conduct she had earned her pardon and come out of prison. Her situation even then was very sad. She had nothing to look to but destitution and universal reprobation. Somebody, however, who knew by what a deep and sincere repentance she had atoned for her crime, helped her to conceal her name and to obtain the means of earning a humble livelihood.'

'M. le Curé,' said M. de Champaubert, in an agitated manner, 'I entreat you to make farther inquiries about her, and let me know the result. It is

my anxious desire to secure her sufficient means to live upon, so that she may end her days in quiet.'

The Abbé Lambert bowed low, and said, 'I will try, M. le Marquis.'

Dom Gêrusac looked at the picture, and said, 'How extraordinary it is that I should have had so long under my eyes, without the least idea of it, the heroine of such a dreadful story. My dear Abbé, you ought to have told me of it.'

The Abbé Lambert looked puzzled.

'That is Mdle. de Malpeire's picture,' I said; 'did you not recognise it, M. l'Abbé?'

He shook his head, and answered sadly, 'No, indeed I did not. Even when I first saw her she had not that blooming, smiling face; she was not like that picture.'

A long silence ensued; the candles were nearly burnt out, but a fresh supply of fagots threw out a blaze which lightened up the room. It had left off raining, but the wind still whistled amongst the trees and shook the outer blinds. When the clock struck twelve, M. de Champaubert got up and wished us good-night. He was to set out early on the following morning, and it was settled that we should walk with him as far as the high-road. Before leaving the room, he went up to the Abbé Lambert, shook him by the hand, and emptying his purse on the corner of the chimney, he said in a low voice, 'This is for your

poor people, M. le Curé; I intend every year to renew the same offering.'

I did not close my eyes for some hours that night, and I do not think M. de Champaubert slept at all. Long after midnight I heard him pacing up and down his room. We were both thinking of that beautiful but guilty woman who had been his first love, and whose portrait had bewitched me thirty-five years afterwards. I could not divest myself even then of a strange interest about her. My mind kept dwelling on her tragical fate. I shuddered at her crime, but thought nevertheless that the Abbat had deserved a thousand deaths for having dared to strike Mdlle. de Malpeire. I ascribed the terrible vengeance she had taken to the proud spirit of her ancestral race, which could not leave an insult unrevenged. The thought of her low-born spouse excited in me both jealousy and anger. In spite of his miserable end, I thought he had been only too happy to be her husband, and envied him his destiny. I spent the night in a feverish, restless state. The same image kept passing and repassing before my eyes, whether I opened or closed them, sometimes smiling, sometimes looking stern and mournful. I was fast asleep, however, when Dom Gêrusac called me the next morning. M. de Champaubert was soon ready, and we started. The mild rays of an autumn sun were gilding the valley, no early frosts had yet blighted the fresh green of the

foliage. The cheery robin-redbreast was chirping in the hawthorn bushes, and beautiful butterflies hovered over the rosemary bushes. But above that level where the soft breezes of the south were blowing from the coasts of the Mediterranean, rose the crests of the mountains, already covered with their snowy mantles.

Before we reached the high-road, M. de Champaubert turned round and gave a last look at the surrounding landscape. He gazed on the two lofty peaks separated by a deep chasm which crowned the southern side of the nearest mountain, and murmured with a deep sigh, 'There is the Pass of Malpeire.' A few minutes afterwards we arrived at the spot where his carriages were waiting. He shook hands with me in a very cordial manner, and then turning to my uncle, said with much feeling, 'Now that we have met again, my dear old friend, I find it hard to part with you.'

'And yet we have had a melancholy time of it,' murmured my poor dear uncle, "and all along of that horrid portrait.'

The two friends embraced. The Marquis sprang into his carriage, and stretching his head out of the window, made us a last sign of farewell. We soon lost sight of the carriage in the midst of a cloud of dust, but stood a while on the roadside watching the white speck vanishing in the distance.

The first thing Dom Gêrusac did when he came

home was to send for Babelou, and to desire her to carry up to the lumber-room the object of my romantic worship. When she had left the room with it, he turned to me and said, 'The sight of that dreadful woman would have disturbed my digestion; I should always have been thinking at dinner of her horrid adventures. And after all, that portrait is a wretched daub. I am sorry to say so, for Champaubert's sake, but really the arm is quite out of proportion, and the little finger of the right hand very badly drawn. In short, it is a wretched performance, and I was very foolish ever to hang it up over my chimney-piece.'

I did not remonstrate against this verdict, nor would I ask my uncle to make me a present of the picture he held so cheap, and which I so highly prized. I should have been afraid of exposing my folly if I had ventured to express a wish to possess it, but I resolved to steal the despised treasure, and to carry it off with me. There was no time to lose, for my holidays were almost over. I was to go back to college on the next day but one. I did not apprehend any great difficulty in the matter. I had only to make my way into the lumber-room, which was in a corner of the attic, to bring away the picture, and to intrust it to some boy, who for an adequate consideration would undertake to carry it to the place where I always met the diligence.

Before going in search of this accomplice, without

whom I could not carry out my scheme, I insidiously questioned Babelou. 'How did you manage, my dear,' I said, 'to get that heavy picture up-stairs? It must have been difficult to find room for it in the attic?'

'O, I just poked it behind the door,' she answered; 'I had something better to do, I promise you, than to hunt out a place for it amidst all the old rubbish up-stairs.'

'Does my uncle keep his odds and ends under lock and key?' I asked, trying to put on an appearance of indifference.

'He thinks he does,' she replied with a shrug; 'but as we are always going in and out for one thing or another, the key generally remains hanging by the side of the door.'

I went away, satisfied with this information, and spent almost all the day wandering about with a gun in my hand, by way of shooting, but really to try and find in the neighbourhood a youth capable of executing my orders. At last I met a young scamp who, for a five-franc piece I gave him, engaged to do my bidding and hold his tongue. I desired him to come that evening, and station himself at the bottom of the alley between eleven and twelve o'clock at night. He was to bring with him two wicker trussels, between which I intended the beloved picture to travel. I fully meant always to keep it with me. When all this



was arranged, I came in and prepared to perform my part in the plot.

It was getting late. The light was waning, and a melancholy silence reigned in the house. There was nobody in the drawing-room, only the dogs sleeping in the arm-chairs. I thought my uncle was in the library, hard at work over his books, and Babelou in the kitchen. The moment seemed particularly favourable. I went up-stairs with flushed cheeks and a beating heart, like a man engaged in a desperate adventure. The lumber-room was, as I said before, on the third story. Just as I arrived at the top of the stairs I met Dom Gêrusac, with his reading-lamp in his hand, and his spectacles pushed back on his forehead. He looked quite grieved and dismayed.

‘Poor Marian,’ he said, ‘is as ill as possible; the Abbé Lambert has just given her the last Sacraments. She may die at any moment.’

My heart sank within me, more, I am ashamed to say, at the failure of my own plans than at the news about Marian. Her room was next to the one where the picture was, and the present state of things made it impossible to remove it without attracting notice from those who were assembled round her bed. My uncle, who was truly grieved about his old servant, took my arm to go down-stairs. We found Babelou crying in the entrance-hall.

‘Poor Marian,’ she said, wiping her eyes with her

apron, 'was too courageous. I am sure she was very ill yesterday, but she would rather have died in the kitchen than go to bed before the dinner was cooked.' And yet she knew very well that she was dangerously ill. Whilst I was waiting at table, she told Gothton to send immediately for M. le Curé. It was for her that he came last night in all that pouring rain. To cheer her up this morning, I showed her the two gold pieces which M. le Marquis had left for us. She then said she felt much better, but it did not last long, and now she is dying !'

We went into the drawing-room, and half an hour afterwards the Abbé Lambert came in and told us all was over. Marian's all but sudden death was one of those events which throw a bachelor's household into sad confusion. My poor uncle was quite distressed, and kept repeating, 'She was a very faithful creature. During the twelve years she lived with me I never had occasion to find the slightest fault with her. It will be no easy matter to replace so good a servant.'

I was occupied meanwhile in considering whether it would be possible to carry off Mdlle. de Malpeire before the next morning. Suddenly my uncle said, 'I wonder who are the heirs of that poor woman? A year's wages were owing to her, and she had put by a little money, I think. If she has any relatives, it must go to them. I must make inquiries.'

The Abbé shook his head ; he was writing a me

morandum for the Registrar. When he had finished it he handed over the paper to my uncle. I saw Dom Gêrusac start, and throw up his hands and eyes with a gesture of profound astonishment. Almost unconsciously I approached, and looking over his shoulder, glanced at the paper and read: 'To-day, October 12, 18—, died at St. Pierre de Corbie, Madeleine Marie de Malpeire, widow of François Pinatel.'

• 'Marian—Marian was Mdle. de Malpeire!' I almost shrieked out the words. The Abbé Lambert and my uncle were both leaning against the table with their hands clasped together; I think they were praying. Babelou was sobbing behind the door.

I went and sat down at the corner of the chimney with my head resting on my hands. I did not move or speak the whole evening, and at about twelve o'clock went to my room. Soon afterwards I heard some one under my windows, calling to me in a suppressed voice. It was my accomplice, who, tired of waiting in the alley, was come to remind me of my appointment.

'I say, Monsieur Frédéric,' he said, 'standing on tip-toe, 'I am come to fetch the picture. Could not you hand it down to me through the window?'

'I have not got it and I do not want it,' I angrily cried; 'go along with you.'

Fifteen years afterwards, after the death of Dom Gêrusac, who had made me his executor and residuary

legatee, I found Mdlle. de Malpeire in the same place where Babelou had put her. The mice had done some mischief to the painting, and the little finger which my poor dear uncle had found so much fault with had disappeared. I had it cleaned and repaired, and it now figures in a very respectable manner in my portrait-gallery.



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